



PLAYSTATION 3

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Official Magazine - UK

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Killzone 2

PS3 goes to Helghan and back



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Welcome



One of my earliest and most potent gaming memories is being taken to the arcade on Eastbourne pier by my grandparents and developing an obsession with Astron Belt. It was an into-the-screen sci-fi shooter, and by any objective judgement, a bit rubbish. But I wasn't objective: I was seven.

What made Astron Belt remarkable was the way it overlaid conventional sprite-based spaceships onto laser disc-generated backgrounds. The affect on my tiny brain was this: "Look, I'm in Star Wars! Well, maybe not Star Wars... but at least Battle Beyond The Stars!" Why mention this now, you may well ask? Because I'd love to go back in time and show the young, innocent, non-ruined me what I'm playing now. (And insist he buys Google shares.)

The young me would weep tears of jealous anger at the sight of Killzone 2. Even now, it triggers that same 'look nan, I'm in a film!' sense of wonder. And, unlike poor old Astron Belt, the gameplay doesn't embarrass the graphics. In fact its thrillingly stern, as you'll see from our world exclusive review on p88. Next month I'll be taunting my childhood with the Resi 5 review.

Tim Clark
Editor-in-chief
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COVER REVIEW



88 KILLZONE 2

Guerrilla's super-shooter finally touches down. This is the world exclusive review.

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Kratos, Dante and Nariko whip their weapons out for your pleasure.



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Brand new games. Cold hard facts. Super pretty screenshots. That's just how we do.

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Who we are...



Tim Clark
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Tim became the tragic victim of a drive-by kebabbing at a recent and very loud SingStar party.

Game of the year
Grand Theft Auto IV
Most anticipated
Resident Evil 5



Ben Wilson
Deputy editor

So traumatised at finishing his The Wire boxset he'll only answer to the name Detective McNulty.

Game of the year
MLB 08: The Show
Most anticipated
Uncharted 2



Leon Hurley
Commissioning editor

Spent the whole issue trying to use a Lol Cat caption. I can haz gunz?

Game of the year
LittleBigPlanet
Most anticipated
Team Ico's next game



Rachel Penny
Agenda editor

Finally beginning to tire of the new, post-marriage nicknames. Bad Penny, Pennywise, Spender...

Game of the year
Fallout 3
Most anticipated
Bioshock 2



Nathan Ditum
Reviews editor

Nath disappointed mums everywhere by cutting off his bouffant hairstyle. He missed a bit at the back.

Game of the year
FIFA 09
Most anticipated
FIFA 10



Helen Woodey
Operations editor

Currently living a double life. Nurse to a vomiting family by night, tired and ruthless grammar tyrant by day.

Game of the year
Guitar Hero World Tour
Most anticipated
Guitar Hero Metallica

Write to the team at opm@futurenet.com

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On your disc



Hey good looking! Love is in the air (or is that cordite?) with Valentine's Day on the way, and this is a token of our affection: nine spanking new demos. Forget soppy cards, we want to shower you with Splicers in Bioshock, seduce you with Solid Snake in MGS4, then get your heart racing with Alone In The Dark: Inferno. There's more, too – a double whammy of bricks with Lego Batman and Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures, then NBA 2K9, Valkyria Chronicles and WW2 drama Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway and 12 sexy demos from the archives. Mwah!

Rachel Penny Agenda editor



Switch your PS3 on, find the Game Icon on the XMB bar and then select 'OPSM' – UK Blu-ray Demo 2009/28



Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots

Join Snake for his final stand. Whether you're a hardcore metal-head or new to the series, this taste of Kojima's genius will show you why OPM readers voted it the best game of 2008.

This month's exclusive highlights...



Bioshock

Learn to survive under water with this introduction to Rapture. (Tip: it involves a wrench and the head of that Splicer that's running towards you.)



Lego Batman The Videogame

Save Gotham as small, yellow versions of the Dark Knight and Robin, then swap sides and play as the villains.



Alone In The Dark: Inferno

Get ready for a nasty surprise in Central Park as Edward Carnby, paranormal investigator. Eew, tramps!



PES 2009

Football just got fiercer with smoother controls and better physics. Try it out for yourself with Man U, Liverpool, Real Madrid, Barcelona or Italy and France.



What if my disc doesn't work?

If it definitely doesn't work, send the disc to Disc Returns, OPM, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW and we'll replace it. You can also email questions to opm@futurenet.com.

Also on the disc this month **Playable** Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway, Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures, NBA 2K9, Valkyria Chronicles, Motorstorm: Pacific Rift, Mercenaries 2: World In Flames, Guitar Hero World Tour, Guitar Hero: Aerosmith, NHL 09, NBA Live 09, Soulcalibur IV, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2009, FIFA 09, Fracture, Haze **Video** Bioshock, Bioshock 2 Teaser, Mirror's Edge Story Part 2, Need For Speed Undercover

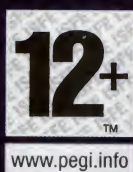
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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about...

Mini Ninjas

Hitman dev is doing it for the kids.

► **Page 12**



Kojima on GOTY

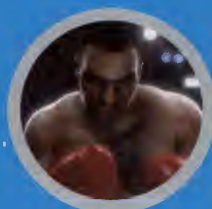
Metal Gear man reflects on winning our top gong.

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Dream bout

Ali vs Tyson is coming to PS3.

► **Page 15**



PS3 secrets

Also coming in 2009...

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FRD run out of time

Timesplitters dev folds.

► **Page 18**

Uncharted 2 secrets

Red-hot Drake info here.

► **Page 21**



1 And the best is yet to come...

Stunning God Of War III footage is just the beginning, says David Jaffe



Fury!

Gloves!

Death!

Right now is a very bad time to be Beowulf, or Conan, or that spiky-armoured chick from Golden Axe. Why? Because daddy's coming home, and he sounds *real* mad. Last month's Spike TV Video Game Awards saw the first public showing of the God Of War III footage, which was already the talk of the internet after the typically restrained reaction of original God Of War creator David Jaffe: "HOLY HOLY HOLY F***ING HELL! This mother f***ing game looks like nothing you've ever played, and you can hold me to that when this thing hits."

And that's basically what we think, too, although with less swearing. Along with the mighty Killzone 2 (reviewed on p88) God Of War III looks

set to showcase what PS3 can *really* do graphically. It looks tremendous, with gorgeous, detailed lighting effects playing off Kratos' flaming Blades Of Chaos and an impressive depth of field effect that makes every other mythological action pretender we've played since God Of War II look like the lazy scribbles of children with two shades of brown felt tip pen.

Deadliest game

There were also some clues as to what we can expect from the gameplay. Obviously the savage twirling Blades return, along with a new pair of giant metal boxing gloves which look like Chains Of Olympus' Gauntlet Of Zeus only double the fun.

The button-matching mini-games are also back – during the footage we see Kratos ripping back the lid of a huge cyclops' eye ready to jam something cold and hard inside – joined by more substantial aerial attacks (substantial meaning 'tearing a harpy in half') and some form of wall-running ability.

And maybe the most exciting thing about it all is that there's more to come – it turns out that this footage was just one of two new God Of War things seen by Jaffe and other insiders, and it's the other one that's *really* exciting. Yeah, we know. Expect a full reveal very soon.

God Of War III currently has no official release date. Check the official site at godofwar.com for more

Have your Jaffe cake...

...and eat it. God Of War creator David Jaffe is possibly the most outspoken (can we say loudmouthed?) games developer anywhere, ever. Which in an industry full of tight lips and marketing babble is definitely a good – and always entertaining – thing. Jaffe maintains a blog at criminalcrackdown.blogspot.com (named after the original title of his PSN game Calling All Cars) which he uses to discuss games, films, and anything else he fancies. Loudly.

2 It's Hitman for kids!

Danish developer unveils Mini Ninjas



Fighting!



Boating!



Foxes!

Going from the elegant, silent death of Hitman and the thick misery soup of Kane & Lynch, you'd be forgiven for guessing that developer IO's next game would be grim, bloody and violent – just like all its others. But you'd be wrong, because its new project is about a teeny set of ninjas and features no killing whatsoever.

The pitch for Mini Ninjas is a mix of late-night kung-fu movies and Sonic The Hedgehog. The Evil Samurai Warlord (in his Evil Fortress Of Doom) has used bad magic to create an army of automated warriors using animals (smash them and the big-eyed furies are released in a puff of smoke). Cut to an idyllic village retreat where the Ninja Master senses the disturbance and sends his best ninjas to find out what's happening. Only they all get captured, so it falls to Hiro and Futo – your typical last-picked-for-football types – to rescue their ninja friends and save the world.

A mini adventure

Mini Ninjas is exciting because although it definitely *is* a kid's game – director Jeremy Petreman says it's aimed primarily at eight to 12-year-olds – there's a depth and intelligence here that most kids' titles simply don't

have. The cutesy squashed cartoon design has an unusually stylish edge to it (it's drawn by the same hand that crafted Agent 47, after all), and the game is at pains to keep things fresh and open. Including Hiro – the agile and stealthy main hero – there are six playable characters, unlocked as you release your fellow ninjas from captivity. You can switch between them at any time depending on what approach you want to take to the situations you face.

Blood relative

And here's where it gets *really* intriguing, because Mini Ninjas incorporates more than a few of the design lessons IO learned with Hitman. Just as Agent 47 could choose between clubbing the postman senseless to infiltrate in disguise or bursting through the front door with 'ballers blazing, in Mini Ninjas you can choose between, say, sneaking past guards by possessing an animal with Hiro, or making them all dance using lady ninja Tsusumi's magical flute. There's an emphasis on stealth, and what we saw of the sneaking sections – tip-toeing across strings of lanterns above a dusty wooden-village street – looked promising.

Inevitably, we *are* a bit sad that this isn't the Hitman announcement we've been waiting for, although studio head Niels Jorgensen confirmed to us that it is one of four games they're currently working on. And in the meantime Mini Ninjas looks inventive, smartly designed and *fun*.

Mini Ninjas will be released at the end of 2009. Expect an official Hitman announcement soon.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



013

Sad panda

The team at IO were over a year into development when Dreamworks' Kung-Fu Panda was released, also featuring martial arts and cartoon animals. "We were looking at it and saying 'What the...?'" says producer Jonas Lind. "My personal reaction was, 'this is not good at all.' But I don't think we're a direct competitor, releasing a year later. It would've been nice to not have them there..."



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

3 Kojima is the big winner

MGS4 creator on scooping our Game Of The Year gong

Your votes have been counted and verified by an independent adjudicator (okay, by Nathan), and Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots is the Game Of The Year 2008. But one man who modestly wouldn't have selected MGS4 is none other than its own creator, Hideo Kojima. We spoke to him about the win, and he told us his favourite PS3 game of the year was LittleBigPlanet: "I hope it sells more and more. I think the graphics and the feel [of the gameplay] are astonishingly well done. I would admit that we cannot make such a game. [It's] well designed too. Really a wonderful game!" He's also such a fan of Mirror's Edge that he visited DICE recently to meet the development team himself (which he also did previously with Assassin's Creed and Ubisoft Montreal).

Could do better?

As for his own huge achievement, Kojima says there are still things he wasn't happy with, despite the almost universal acclaim Guns Of The Patriots has garnered since its release last June. "I felt that the [development] workload was not well-balanced due to the enormous size of the game, and it being in high quality," he admits. "Originally, for example, there were more events and games between the cut-scenes, which I had to cut down. And graphics wise I am not satisfied. I wanted to get into more detail with graphics and effects

but coordinating such programming even with the Cell engine was hard."

The most shocking event to come out of Metal Gear Solid 4 was [massive spoiler alert 1] that lead man Solid Snake didn't die, although the game teases the event. And Kojima admits that the ending wasn't how he originally planned it, which tallies with his previous hints about killing off his main man. "MGS4's ending has changed from the one I planned at the very beginning," he says. "The original ending was more like the one in the movie The Dark Knight - not a bad ending but not a really happy ending either." [Massive spoiler alert 2: Batman sacrifices his reputation for the greater good with Commissioner Gordon, alone, knowing the truth.]

As for what's next, he remains tight-lipped. "I wish to manage a team myself like I did back in the days when I worked on Policenauts. Ideally, I want to share game ideas with all of my staff on design and to check all of the quality together. However, with the spec and quality level that is expected nowadays, this cannot be done with only ten to 20 people." Bottom line: even if it ends up as just Kojima typing lines of code into a dusty Acorn Electron, we're still betting that the end result will be magic.

What other games made it into your top ten of 2008? Our Game Of The Year feature kicks off on p54.



Mech the grade

Kojima admits that making MGS4 was super hard. "It was the hardest one among the series," he says. "This time there were three factors [necessary] to make MGS4 compare with the other games: 1) By making it on PS3, we required higher quality graphics processing and detailed design. 2) We had to complete the story of the entire series. In the past, there was only one set area [to deal with], but in MGS4 each Act was a huge stage of its own. 3) The volume of the game, storyline and stages got enormous. This led to the number of our staff being inflated so we could handle it."

■ Tyson comes forward like a bull on PCP while Ali weaves his magic.



4

Tyson vs Ali on PS3

PS3
015

Fight Night Round 4 lands an early knockout

Not-so-iron Mike

Fight Night 2004 was the first game in EA's current boxing series, and a natural successor to its often underwhelming Knockout Kings series. Ali appeared in FN 2004, as he has in every Fight Night since, but this will be Tyson's series debut – although he was affiliated with his own game, the Codemasters-produced Mike Tyson Championship Boxing on PS2, back in 2002. Wondering why it never spawned a sequel? Look no further than its disastrous metacritic score: 33 out of 100.

The question is, why has no boxing game done this before? (Answer: no one put their hands deep enough into their pockets.) But now it's on like Donkey Kong: Muhammad Ali vs Mike Tyson. The greatest of all time against the self-proclaimed baddest man on the planet. The dream match to end all dream matches is actually going to happen in Fight Night Round 4. And it looks amazing.

The only footage released so far is a trailer that focuses on both the fighter's faces before they begin swinging at one another, but that

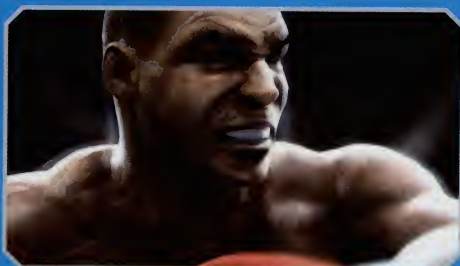
alone has us desperate for more. The detail is almost eerily reminiscent of both men in their prime. Facial features, biceps, skin textures – even the line through Tyson's savage buzzcut looks astonishingly lifelike.

Top of the bill

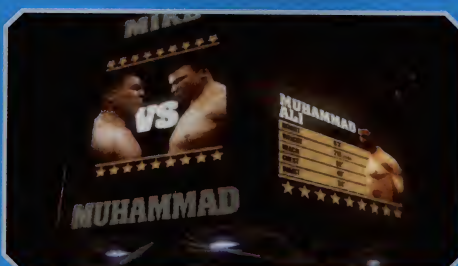
Given the trailer's emphasis on Fight Night Round 4's visual prowess it's hard to tell how the gameplay has been improved since Round 3. But that was so good that we're not even slightly worried about this turning out to be a bit, well, Facebreaker.

As for the rest of its inevitably star-studded roster, Lennox Lewis, Sugar Ray Leonard, George Foreman, Floyd Mayweather Jr, Winky Wright, Oscar De La Hoya and Manny Pacquiao are all apparently 'on the shortlist' – in other words, they'll be in as long as EA ponies up enough shiny dollars. We'll be revealing more of the big name boxers (fingers crossed for Calzaghe) early in 2009, until then we'll be floating like a bee and stinging like a butterfly. Wait...

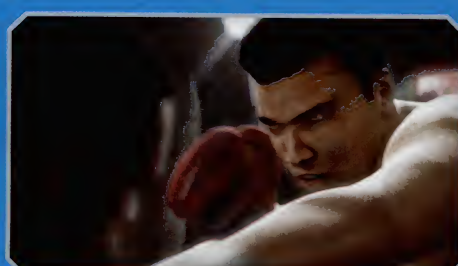
Fight Night Round 4 will hit in summer 2009. Watch the trailer at ellortyson.com.



■ It's a game, yet seeing Iron Mike get angry is still terrifying.



■ The arena, crowd and scoreboard all look the part too.



■ The Greatest works Tyson with his super-accurate jab.



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



Assassin's Creed 2

Always planned as a trilogy, rumour has it the sequel is set in 1789 during the French Revolution – a chaotic period that would suit stealth, and also a similarly bold choice to the Holy Land in the huge-selling original. Oh, and you'll also be able to swim this time.



New Team Ico game

All that's been seen is a rusty chain disappearing into a hole in the ground. Disastrously vague for any other game, deliciously cryptic coming from Team Ico. We predict codependent characters and more info revealed at the Game Developers Conference in March.



Secret games

The titles publishers don't want to show you... yet

Doomed games?

Just as there are plenty of exciting unannounced games in the works, there are also numerous titles in development that may never actually hit the street. For instance, Midway's financial troubles may put paid to Wheelman and This Is Vegas, and for similar reasons Eidos's Just Cause 2 could be threatened. Ubisoft's Splinter Cell series remains stranded in a strange – seriously, anyone know what's going on? – limbo, and rumours continue to circulate that WWE wants out of its contract with THQ, which, if true, could mean no Smackdown vs Raw 2010.

You'll notice a few glaring omissions in our otherwise magisterial 2009 preview feature (starting p70). That's because the big publishers are keeping their cards close to their chests. But not close enough to keep the prying, needy fingers of OPM out. For the most part, these are games which everyone knows are on the way, but as yet remain under wraps in advance of a full reveal.

For instance, EA is already working on ideas for both Dead Space 2 and Mirror's Edge 2, although the latter won't necessarily follow the same formula as the first game. EA CEO

John Riccitiello explains: "We'll probably look at some issues around the design to make sure a strong IP is married with strong business." Let's hope Faith doesn't lose her edge. EA is also working on an unnamed football sequel, an unnamed NFL sequel, an unnamed ice hockey sequel, an unnamed golf sequel and an unnamed basketball sequel (we're really scratching our heads on those), plus Resident Evil creator Shinji Mikami remains beaver-ing away on his new horror game for the super-publisher. And rumours that the Need For Speed series is to be canned are

false – so much so that we'll have an exclusive preview of the next game in that series next issue.

Also coming from EA is another Medal Of Honor game, tentatively entitled Operation Anaconda and set in Afghanistan circa 2002. And EA isn't the only publisher getting shooty. Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 was quietly confirmed by Activision last month, with an Eastern European setting most likely (see above). Sega, already working on Aliens: Colonial Marines, has another licensed sci-fi blaster on the way, while the ubiquitous Unreal engine has been



Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

Officially confirmed in Activision's fiscals, we reckon that, with the first game set in the Middle East and Russia, and the next Medal Of Honor likely to be set in Afghanistan, the odds-on setting for our most wanted game of 2009 will be somewhere in Eastern Europe. Uzbekiserbarus it is, then...

of 2009

licensed for another brand new game. Meanwhile, Brothers In Arms dev Gearbox has slots for three mystery games on its site.

Cop this

With Lewis Hamilton sitting pretty as F1 World Champion we've been calling Codemasters on an almost daily basis to check the status of their upcoming F1 game, but to no avail – indeed, you might have to wait until 2010 to see it on PS3. (But given the strength of the Race Driver Grid and Colin McRae Dirt games, you can bet it'll be worth the wait.) Our recent trip to see IO Interactive confirmed that a new Hitman is coming, and a renowned British publisher recently

popped in to show us a tantalising glimpse of its brilliant-looking crime game based in a super-authentic American city. It will inevitably invite comparisons to GTA IV – however, unlike Rockstar's sandbox classic you're working on the side of the law.

Still want more? How about Rockstar Toronto working on Max Payne 3? Or Star Wars Battlefront III moving from Free Radical (RIP) to Rebellion? Or – maybe most excitingly of all – Capcom's Dead Rising 2, the sequel to the brilliant Xbox 360 zombie mash-up, apparently being set in Las Vegas? Damn. It looks like we're going to need more pages.

Heard any rumours we haven't mentioned? Let us know at opm@futurenet.com and we'll investigate.

6 The biggest Blu-ray ever

Pioneer unveils 400GB monster disc

Blu-ray could be about to go stupid-sized with the announcement of a whopper 400GB disc, created by Pioneer. While current BDs have one or two 25GB layers, Pioneer's new beast – demoed at the recent Taipei IT Month trade show – allows for up to 16 layers on a single disc, and they say it's PS3 compatible.

Increasing Blu-ray's already prodigious storage by a factor of eight opens up a wealth of new possibilities, especially when it comes to movie-playback. The full 50MB per second bandwidth of Blu-ray can be unleashed, resulting in absolutely pristine, zero-loss film transfers. Multi-disc TV series boxsets could become a thing of the past too, with a single BD able to contain a full season run.

Deep space

There are clear advantages for gaming too. Assuming Sony adopts Pioneer's new technology, developers would essentially have near-limitless storage on tap, meaning more content, better visuals and uncompressed 7.1 surround audio as standard. Realistically, however, gaming is unlikely to benefit in the short term. Thus far only MGS4 uses the 50GB disc while the majority of releases barely use 10GB. Creating all that extra game content means a huge additional investment from already cash-strapped games developers, most of whom also need to cater for the DVD-centric Xbox 360. But for the next generation? With PS4, perhaps? The technology's there, and the sky's the limit.





The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



7

Game over for Free Radical Design

Timesplitters developer enters administration

Free Radical Design gameography

Active for just shy of ten years, Free Radical Design released a total of five games. Four of these were for PS2, and three of the four were entries into the Timesplitters series. Perhaps tellingly though, the studio never settled on a regular publisher. The ill-fated Haze was the studio's only PS3 title. **Timesplitters**, PS2, 2000
Timesplitters 2, PS2, 2002
Second Sight, PS2, 2004
Timesplitters: Future Perfect, PS2, 2005
Haze, PS3, 2008



Friends, raise a hand in silent salute at the passing of Free Radical Design. The Nottingham-based studio behind *Second Sight*, *Haze* and the *Timesplitters* series has entered administration. The internet began fizzing with rumours just before Christmas – staff arriving at work to find the building locked, an emergency meeting in a nearby hotel – which was swiftly followed by a statement from the administrators, Resolve Partners, that it was “assessing the financial position of the company” and had asked that “all of the employees apart from a skeleton crew remain at home”. It was bleak like the *Eastenders* Christmas special.

Radical departure

FRD was started in 1999 by David Doak, Steve Ellis, Karl Hilton and Graeme Norgate, who had been part

of the Rare team behind touchstone shooters *Goldeneye* and *Perfect Dark*. The studio produced arguably the best (and certainly our favourite) shooter on PS2 with the insanely playable *Timesplitters 2*, and one of the system's most underrated games, psychic actioner *Second Sight*.

But the next-gen gear-shift did not go smoothly. Last year's *Haze* was a huge disappointment, and after its universally poor reception, Free Radical's other projects ran into trouble. Production was halted on an unannounced game in development for LucasArts (almost certainly *Star Wars Battlefront III*), which rumour suggests has now been passed on to Oxford-based Rebellion. The killer blow, though, appears to have been FRD's failure to find a publisher for *Timesplitters 4*, which had already been in development for a year, leading to a cash flow crisis.

Coming so soon after the collapse of Pivotal Games, the studio behind the *Conflict* series, it's also a worrying sign that independent developers can no longer afford a single misstep if they're to stay in the prohibitively expensive business of next-gen development.

Key members of the Free Radical team, including Ellis and Doak, have apparently already moved on to form a new studio called Pumpkin Beach (pumpkinbeach.com is already live with a 'coming soon' message). But at the time of writing the future for the *Timesplitters* series remains unclear. Whatever happens, we'll always remember Free Radical as the studio that gave 'Splitters 2' – so if you need us we'll be tearfully playing split-screen on the Hospital map, using only SB-90s, for one last time...

The future for *Timesplitters* should become clear as the administration process winds up. More soon.



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8

Who will survive...

...and what will become of them in I Am Alive?

Act of god

I Am Alive's trailer, which showed Adam being chased by three scavengers before baiting them with a bottle of water and sending them to their deaths, was picked over by internet forums like the bones of a Serengeti gazelle. One of the things they found was an in-game advertising board carrying the url www.ruamoko.com, which led to early – and, it turns out, correct – speculation about the nature of the disaster in the game: Ruamoko is the name of a Maori god whose movements cause earthquakes.

The brief white-collar apocalypse trailer for I Am Alive shown at E3 raised questions rather than answered them. Who's this guy Adam? Why is he being chased by a gang of scruffy commuters? And how come Chicago's become a ruined pile of devastated skyscrapers?

Well, Ubisoft has finally started drip-feeding info. Like the fact that the hero's full name is Adam Collins, a junior executive caught up in a giant earthquake that has reduced the Windy City to rubble. With the power out and no way of communicating with the outside world, Adam's to do list

contains just two items: number one, find his ex-girlfriend Alice, because he still secretly loves her (honestly), and number two, survive.

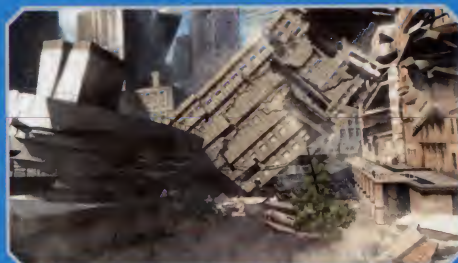
Adam and grieve

The really interesting thing is that the gameplay looks like it'll be a smart combination of survival horror-style problem solving and intelligently designed moral conundrums. How so? Well, generally speaking Adam's definitely a good guy – he'll be helping survivors to build a refugee camp to attract the attention of potential rescuers. But there will be choices

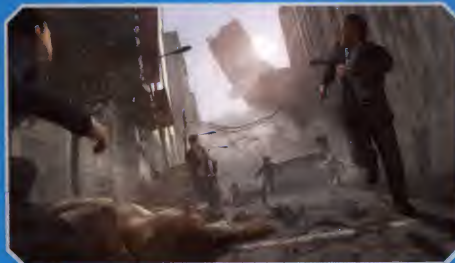
along the way, like when he's confronted by groups of looters, or, even more interestingly, when it seems that protecting innocents isn't necessarily the best course of action.

Translating these ambitions into hands-on playability will be a serious challenge, and no concrete details or footage of how it works have emerged yet. But so long as they definitely include bits of massive buildings collapsing around you, and the ability to take sweets and/or water away from hungry bankers, then we're in.

I Am Alive is being developed by Ubisoft Montreal and will be released later in the spring.



■ "Costly that, dodgy foundations. Must've been a right cowboy."



■ The 'suit 'n' tie civvies in a lawless world' angle is very Lost.



■ Note: for actual falling buildings, the brace position won't work.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



9 The secrets of Uncharted 2

Naughty Dog co-president spills the beans on *Among Thieves*

Prising info on *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* out of developer Naughty Dog right now is tricky like searching for undersea treasure wearing only a snorkel and water wings. But that hasn't stopped us trying, and in this case that involved doorstepping co-president, Evan Wells, who told us how work was going on the hugely anticipated adventure sequel.

"We received a lot of feedback regarding the length of some of our combat setups in *Uncharted*, and the numbers of enemy waves introduced in a combat space was sometimes excessive," he admits. As a result, the number of enemy waves has been reduced, and the way the AI approaches both gunplay and melee combat has been much improved. "Some enemies will have shields that you have to contend with, others are wearing body armour that needs to be shot off piece by piece, and others will counter your melee attacks, which forces you to dodge their retaliation before finishing them off."

Dark Drake

Wells also hints the new game will feature an altogether darker tone than the matinee movie vibe of the original game, *Drake's Fortune*. "The subtitle *Among Thieves* has several layers of meaning that will become clear as we divulge more details of the story, but it does allude to the criminal underworld of smugglers and thieves that Drake inhabits, and



Dev bio

Evan Wells started out on Toejam & Earl for the Mega Drive. He worked on Gex at Crystal Dynamics before joining Naughty Dog as lead designer on *Crash Bandicoot 3*. He's since progressed to co-president.

the dangerous circumstances he finds himself in over the course of this new adventure."

As in the first game, the villains that Drake comes across will have a major effect on the tone of the storyline. "If you're a criminal in the modern-day treasure-hunting world, you're surrounded by some pretty shady characters. What kind of friends would you have? What kind of lovers?" So there's a chance that along with new love interest Chloe Frazer (pictured), Drake has to align himself with underhand crooks... We like the sound of that.

But does Wells worry that Ubisoft casting Nolan North – the voice of Drake – as the lead man in *Prince Of Persia* might threaten the unique feel of *Uncharted 2*? "Absolutely not," he insists. "We have forged a strong partnership and working relationship with Nolan and wish nothing but the best for him – that includes having him get as much work and recognition as possible. It's great that people realise the level of professionalism he can bring to a project."

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves is out later this year. For more see our Games Of 2009 feature, beginning on p70.



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

10 Do gamers care about originality?

Our top boys debate the value of innovation



No

Says 'sequels are the opium of the people' firebrand, **Nathan Ditum**



Yes

Says forward-thinking, ambassador of hope, **Leon Hurley**

The notion that gamers care about originality is clearly, demonstrably untrue. Look at the biggest two publishers in the world, EA and Activision. For years, EA harvested money from credulous gamers by churning out below-par yearly updates and mangled tie-ins. Recently, it did an about face. It poured money into its sports franchises, resulting in across the board improvements and a fixed FIFA, and it invested in completely new, genuinely exciting ideas like *Dead Space* and *Mirror's Edge*. The result? EA recorded a \$310 million loss and its projected income for next year was slashed, because the sequel-loving sheep the company had previously relied on deserted them.

Repeat to fade

And where did those same sheep go? They shuffled over to the bright lights and loud noises of Activision. Activision didn't try anything new this year – it openly stated that its plan was to focus on games with sequel potential. It wants to sell you the same game, year after year after year, with minimal changes. And you're buying it. The limping, workmanlike *Call Of Duty: World At War* – basically a pale imitation of *COD4* – has, at the time of writing, been sat at the top of the charts for four straight weeks. Gamers don't want originality – they want what they had before, only a little better. Or, if you make the adverts loud enough, slightly worse.

Do new game concepts instantly give you the fear? Email opm@futurenet.com, subject: NO.

You've only got to look at our Games Of The Year feature (p54) to see that people *love* originality. There's tons of innovation: fresh ways of playing online with *COD* and *Resistance 2*'s multiplayer. A totally new RPG targeting system within *Fallout 3*'s FPS action, an incredible open world in *Far Cry 2*, pioneering first-person movement thanks to *Mirror's Edge* and a 'paint a line on the floor' navigation system there's no turning back from in horror feast *Dead Space*. Practically every game you voted into the top ten brings something new to the table.

Ch, ch, changes

Transformation is part of just about any remotely exciting game coming up. It doesn't have to be a radical concept, either. Look at *Street Fighter IV*. Sure, it's an update of *SF2* but look at that art style. I doubt it would be such an electrifying proposition without it. It's that tiny bit of improvement; the 'something' you haven't seen before that lifts the whole package. Even if you don't consciously think about it, you crave innovation. That's the beauty with originality – it only takes little steps to keep things moving forwards, and our Games Of The Year feature proves that it's what gamers want. Besides, if nobody had a thirst for it, nothing would ever change. If that were the case we'd still be wearing crushed velvet slacks and playing Pong. Yeah? You like the sound of that, don't you?

Do you care about originality in your games? Email opm@futurenet.com, subject: YES.

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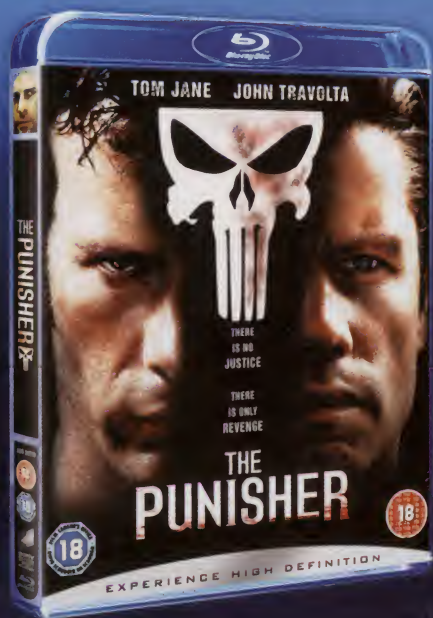
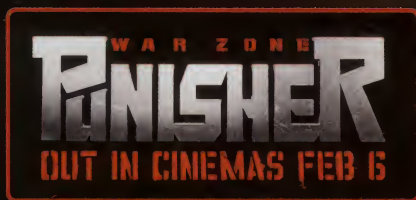
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Informer

Agenda

PlayStation flame wars

How your online rant can affect the way a game gets made

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Your gamer's guide to the month ahead.

If you've spent five minutes anywhere near the internet you'll be aware that gaming forums can be a Conan-sized double-edged sword. On the one hand, they enable people who share a common interest to come together. On the other, they can be throbbing vats of acrid raw opinion, where anonymity encourages reactionary rage in response to even the most innocently noobish comment. So with the internet encouraging game developers to connect more personally with the people who play their games, isn't the industry just setting itself up for a whole lot of flame-grilled pain?

▲ Fan input was high on the agenda during Street Fighter II Turbo HD's development.



Hall of flame

Some devs just can't help throwing petrol on the barbecue...



God Of War creator **David Jaffe** is much loved for his honesty and occasional outbursts. Not by everyone though. A recent Jaffe-penned post on NeoGAF prompted over 100 replies fighting over his worth, before the man himself stepped back in with some interesting comments about users' mothers...



Silicone Knights' **Denis Dyack** doesn't make life very easy for himself. Nearly ten years after starting Too Human on PS1, preview criticism of the eventual Xbox 360 game prompted him to call out the entire NeoGAF forum and publicly brand it 'dangerous'. Too Human got panned regardless.



Nothing beats **Derek Smart's** Usenet flame-war over his 1996 PC game Battlecruiser 3000. A ten-year development cycle and a release full of bugs led to a very lengthy series of fights and vicious personal attacks on players, the severity of which would make any troll blush. The horror is still archived online to this day.

"It is a difficult balancing act," says George Williams, senior community manager for Codemasters, "but I think one that most community managers do very well. We always allow our members to speak freely about our games – we even encourage them to debate other games. There are occasions where we need to step in, when people just generally rant, but if you manage that correctly, the ranting often turns into something extremely constructive."

It's also a sentiment held by Williams' counterpart at Capcom, Street Fighter overlord Seth Killian. "Even anger can be a good thing when you think about it. The only people who get angry over gaming-related things are the people who really care about the products. People get upset because this stuff is important to them, so whatever we can do to respect those feelings should be, by definition, important to us."

Lynch mob

But while discrete online communities can be managed to relative harmony, the internet as a whole remains much like a sleeping dragon. Poke it too hard and it will wake up angry, scorching you with everything it's got. Just look at the flak Eidos took during last year's now infamous Kane & Lynch debacle. Following editor Jeff Gerstmann's mysterious departure from Gamespot after a negative review he posted, gaming forums exploded with accusations of corruption, swiftly building into a loosely organised campaign that saw both the website and the game mauled without mercy.

For all the posters' indignance and absolute 'certainty' of a conspiracy though, it's interesting to note that the online elite of gaming culture perhaps aren't as influential

as they might like to think. Despite the backlash and largely below average review scores, Kane & Lynch didn't sell too badly at all. See, while the hardcore may rule the forums, we're gaming in the era of an expanded, more mainstream audience these days, so non-specialist reviewers and casual players bypassed the whole affair and accepted the game on their own terms, away from all the hysteria.

So does that mean gamers' online voices are irrelevant; segregated from reality like a hand grenade going off in a bomb shelter? Not at all. It's just that however loud it may be, the searing venom of the internet eventually becomes little more than background noise, while mature dialogue genuinely makes a difference. Killian says, "I wish I could make more people believe what an impact their voices really make, because our games are shaped directly by fan feedback on Capcom-Unity.com. From little things like game patches that address concerns directly, all the way to games like Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix, which is basically all fan-influenced, featuring fan-driven design changes, art, fan-chosen achievements, and a fan-remixed soundtrack. As long as people respect the reasons behind why we release information at specific times and have a little common sense, I think there are very few dangers."

So it turns out that developers are listening to what gamers have to say after all. Quite carefully, in fact. It's just that the crucial word there is 'say' rather than 'shout'. The word 'forum' does, after all, mean a place to discuss matters of common interest, not a soapbox from which to lay down internet justice, so let's turn those caps lock keys off and start doing some good.

RUMOUR MACHINE

Insider whispers

EA is to hold an auction that will be open to every player in the NFL for the chance to be Madden 2010's cover star.



Developers are already working on games for PSP2, which is tentatively scheduled for release in 2010.



Tetsuya Mizuguchi is looking to make a sequel to Rez, the rights for which are currently owned by Sega.

Square Enix will unveil a 'different from Final Fantasy' MMO at E3.

A PSP version of brilliant off-road racer Motorstorm is in the works and may be released before the end of 2009.



Despite the fact that FEAR 2 isn't even out yet, Monolith is already working on FEAR 3.

Indiana Jones and Batman weren't the last film favourites to be turned into blocks – Lego Harry Potter is on the way.



Final Fantasy The Musical

Meet the singing cosplay collective

▣ The costumes are all homemade at JAC's regular sewing parties.



Ever wondered what it would be like if the boys and girls of Final Fantasy VII laid down their surfboard-sized swords and saved the world with a song? Well, it might look something like Final Dance Fantasy – a five-minute-musical skit that features Tifa, Yuffie and Rude shaking their nerd booties to tunes like I Will Survive. You can see it at snipurl.com/72n30.

It's the work of JAC Productions, 14 friends from Texas. They've created videos and cosplay collections based on Kingdom Hearts and Bleach, but Final Dance Fantasy was their biggest challenge. "It took several months to write, record the soundtrack and choreograph the dance scenes," said Catherine, who plays Tifa.

Renee (Yuffie) told us, "It was excitingly random, thinking up old popular dances like disco and the Apache." And it's a YouTube hit, racking up over 500,000 hits. I knew people would hear about us around Texas, but we're getting viewers from Europe and South America!" said founding member Kim. The group has had to curb the singing recently, as its members are in college, but Kim told us, "We're on hiatus on the skit-making, but very much alive in the cosplay department!"

◀ The impressive gallery on the group's website is all thanks to their friend, photographer Shawn Shu.



Get a promotion using your PSP

Hilton hotel staff trained using Sony handheld

Return to your hotel room to find the cleaner sitting on your bed playing PSP and usually it's your cue to call security to awkwardly retrieve your belongings. Stay at a Hilton Garden Inn in the US, however, and it's more likely they're doing a spot of on-the-job training. HGI Ultimate Team Play is a Sims-like game developed for Sony's handheld and designed to train its employees in the fine art of customer service ('bite tongue, resist urge to throttle, and smile').

Conceived after one of the chain's executives noticed how absorbed his daughter was when she was playing a game, the edutainment title was developed by Virtual Heroes Inc, the guys behind a growing raft of Federal virtual training software, and the infamous America's

Army recruitment shooter. Created around the company's customer satisfaction surveys Ultimate Team Play will put players/staff through a series of challenging scenarios – 'Yeah, I stopped flushing after it overflowed' – with their responses affecting the virtual hotel's overall Satisfaction And Loyalty Tracking (SALT) score. Chains Of Olympus it ain't, but as David Kervella, senior manager of brand education told us, "Our hotels have been very excited about UTP. Many general managers have contacted me asking to be a beta hotel." No mention on how you fail the game, though. Maybe the final level is 'You enter the guest's bedroom. There's a hooker in the bath and a case of diamonds on the floor..'



WHO SAID THAT?

V.I.P. quotes

"It was like playing against Ronaldinho on PlayStation! The same run-up!" Penalty-saving Palermo keeper **Marco Amelia**

Hollywood director **Darren Aronofsky** hearts GTA IV. "I wish they made this game when I was a teenager."

Sigourney Weaver not-so politely declines to be in the Aliens game: "Every other word out of my mouth was a curse word."

"These old f***** dinosaur bands that don't want anything to do with Rock Band... It's stupid." Megadeth's Dave Mustaine embraces gaming.

OPM HOT TOPIC

Who is your favourite PlayStation enemy?



Dave Matthews
Principal art lead, Eldos

"The Helghast. Ivy and Voldo from Soulcalibur. The Puzzles from LittleBigPlanet – is that an enemy? Liquid from MGS1... I can keep going... when do you want me to stop?"



Barbara Gamlen
International PR manager, LucasArts

"The creatures in Silent Hill. The idea of a subjective enemy that only exists as a mirror of your psyche is a wonderful gameplay mechanic."



Richard Lemarchand
Co-lead game designer, Naughty Dog

"Too many to choose from! I'll say the colossi (Shadow Of The Colossus). I'm not sure those fellows are enemies, though!"



Jason Avent
Game director, Black Rock Studios

"All the boss enemies from the first Metal Gear game on PS1. They all played completely differently and were really strong characters."



Hard times

Why Ben Wilson will never screw with his PS3 hard drive again

To say I have a mild temper is like saying Amy Winehouse occasionally enjoys a small tippie. It doesn't take much to turn me into King Furious. Bad refereeing decision at Palace? I'm kicking the seat in front, even if there's a lady in it. Neighbours doing DIY in the evening? The wife has to stop me doing my own 'DIY' on their windows. Remembering the time I had to review Driver Parallel Lines? Best remove all sharp objects. But nothing has enraged me so much as upgrading my PS3 hard drive.

Web of lies

If you're a SingStore addict as I am, it's a necessary evil. 60GB was never enough to contain my endless karaoke downloads, so during a recent week off I set about upgrading to a bigger model. First step: tracking down a 500GB drive on the net. And I should have known things weren't going to run smoothly when, hours after ordering it, an email said my order was 'pending' – despite the company's website still

screws are locked in super, super tight, and two gentle twists of my screwdriver is enough to strip the head off each of them. I spend the afternoon glaring at my now useless machine, boiling with rage, doing what I do best in this situation: hoping the wife can fix it when she gets in. Thursday wasted.

Wife home. After ten minutes of her delicately trying to grip the now completely wrecked screwheads, it's clear nothing can be done.



Excited about his upgrade, this pic is of Ben, pre-Hulk.

"I'm upgraded. It's only cost me an *entire week off work* to get there."

saying it was in stock. Monday wasted.

Tuesday brought better news: a 250GB drive successfully ordered and dispatched. I'd cleared all my saves off the 60GB by now, so resigned myself to being PS3-less until the new drive arrived. On the Wednesday I waited and waited, but by 1pm there was no sign of it, so I popped out to buy some lunch... and returned to find a red slip telling me it'd be at my local sorting office because I wasn't in at *20 minutes past one*. Postman Pat voodoo doll ordered. Tuesday and Wednesday wasted.

Thursday: I finally get my hands on the new drive. Now the easy bit, right? Nu-uh. The case containing the hard drive slips out of my PS3 fine, but can I get the 60GB out of it? Can I hell. The tiny

Pliers are tried. Pliers are fail. I storm around the house, slamming doors. I put Mansun's Six album on, run myself a bath, and spend ten minutes stewing in my own anger, like a lobster who knows he's about to be boiled and eaten.

Deflated, frustrated, *beaten*, I return downstairs. The wife has all but given up, but suggests I try a small pair of Wilkinson's wire clippers instead. So I do... and wouldn't you frickin' know it – in seconds all four screws pop right out. The 250GB drive slides into place. The anger washes away: I'm relieved, delighted, exultant. And I'm upgraded. It's only cost me an *entire week off work* to get there. So I do the only appropriate thing in the circumstances: I drink. Like Amy Winehouse.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE



Rachel Penny strikes a blow for women everywhere in **Home**

Forget queuing up for virtual pool, the best fun you can have in Home is by being a girl. There are so few women online that your female avatar only has to walk into a room to see dozens of European men simultaneously break into the running man dance, or bashing out badly spelled chat-up lines. "R u rly a gurl?" Sigh. I like to dress my avatar in tiny shorts, get everyone bopping provocatively, then jump to the menu and turn her into a strapping man. Some of my online suitors swear, some laugh, most just scatter like startled antelope. I could tell you all this is an important anthropological experiment but I'd only be... LOOK! It's another girl! Go get her!





Berg Ferrari FXX Go Kart

Kids today don't know they're born. We had derelict shopping trolleys, they get go-karts with dashboard computers. Still, the joke's on them when they find out we've used all the oil up...

£1,230

bergtoys.co.uk

Offside Football Coffee Table

Everything in life should be fun, even your coffee table. Next, we'd like a washing machine that's also an alarm clock.

£1,295

libertygames.co.uk



Harman Kardon GLA-55 Speakers

The perfect piece of audio kit if you live in an igloo, a magical frost palace or some kind of transdimensional future prison.

£740

harmankardon.com



Want that

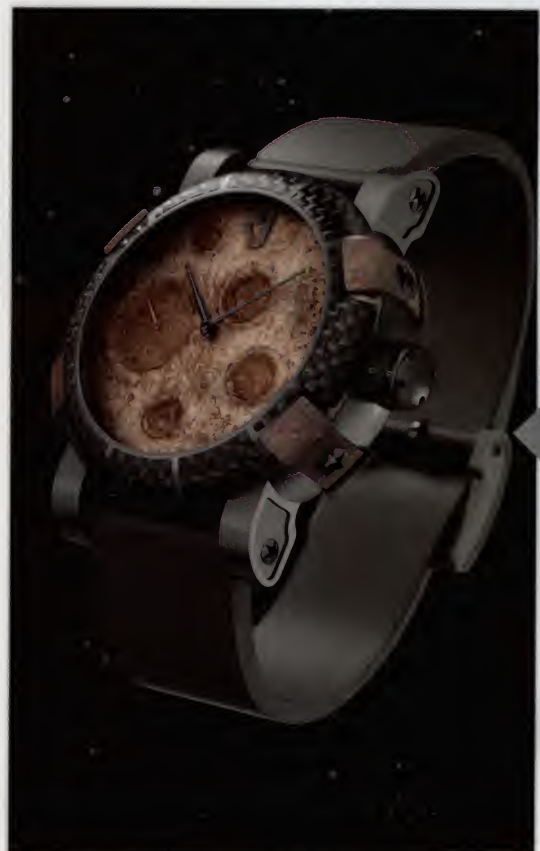
Just-have kit for PlayStation people

Clocky

Make sure you're always on time for work, and in a murderous rage when you arrive. This alarm clock runs away and hides when it goes off. Chase me, chase me!

£40

suckuk.com



Moon Dust-DNA Watch

A strong contender for the most ridiculous timepiece ever. It doesn't just have moon dust melted into the dial, it's made with fragments from Apollo 11 as well.

£300,000

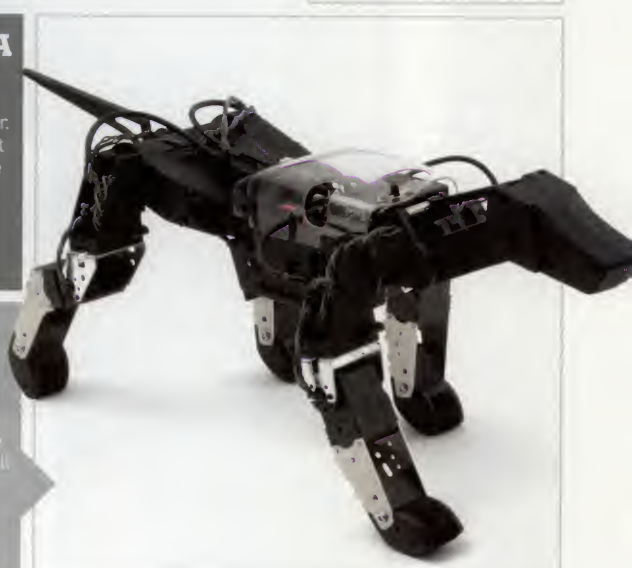
romainjerome.ch

HPI G-Dog

Build your own canine companion like a really mad mad scientist. It'll make a great guard dog, it only barks if the burglars will take it and leave all your money behind.

£675

hpirobot.jp



Prices and availability of products are all correct at time of going to press

Agenda

Sony

Screen queen

There are two 262,144 colour TFT screens for maximum viewing pleasure, whether you're checking the name of the track that's playing or streaming video from the internet.

The facts

Stores 8,000 songs
3.2 megapixel camera
8GB memory
100g
94 x 46 x 16.9

Sony Ericsson

Orange Girl
Aiphos
-03:36



Sony Ericsson W980 Walkman Phone



Or the new Sony Walksson, to its friends



£250

sonyericsson.com

In a nutshell

Like the gadget equivalent of Suri Cruise, this is the beautiful result of a union between two powerful brands – Walkman and Ericsson. Inside that immaculate shell there's room for 8,000 tracks, and Sony's impeccable audio know-how means a giant leap in sound quality for your mobile music. So whether you sync tracks to it with your PC or download them directly with the 3G data connection, you know they're going to sound crisp and clear.

What's so special?

Sony has two new sound systems called Clear Audio and Clear Bass, which make sure that what you're hearing is as close to its original recording as possible. There's built-in track recognition so you'll always know what you're listening to, and a graphic equaliser to make the most any tune, from Mogwai to Miley Cyrus. And you can forget about wires or speakers, because a built-in FM transmitter means you can listen to your music through any car stereo or hi-fi with an FM radio.

Tell me more...

As well as rendering your MP3 player useless, this piano black lovely comes with all the latest phone features. There's the 3.2 megapixel camera, which packs a digital zoom for extreme close-ups. You can upload images and video straight to Blogger to keep your eager fanbase (hi dad) constantly updated, then check their comments with the internet browsing capabilities. Add to that video calling, a PA's worth of organiser features and Java for 3D gaming and this makes having a separate phone and MP3 player sooooo 2008.

Push my buttons

All the essential Walkman controls can be accessed on the outside of the sexy clamshell design for easy access. An accelerometer also means you can skip tracks by simply shaking your phone.

PLAYSTATION TOP 10 CHARTS

This month's heroes and zeroes

▲ Up ▼ Down ● Non mover + New entry

PS3

- ▲ LittleBigPlanet
- ▼ Call Of Duty World At War
- ▼ Resistance 2
- FIFA 09
- Need For Speed Undercover
- ▲ Fallout 3
- ▲ Prince Of Persia
- ▼ Tomb Raider Underworld
- ▼ Motorstorm Pacific Rift
- ▲ WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2009

Source chart-track.co.uk

PS2

- FIFA 09
- Need For Speed Undercover
- ▲ Call Of Duty World At War
- ▼ WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2009
- Quantum Of Solace
- Guitar Hero World Tour
- ▲ Madagascar ETA
- Lego Indiana Jones
- ▼ Star Wars TFU
- ▲ Guitar Hero III LOR

Source chart-track.co.uk

PSP

- FIFA 09
- Need For Speed Undercover
- Lego Batman
- Football Manager 2009
- PES 2009
- WWE SmackDown vs Raw 2009
- Midnight Club LA Remix
- Star Wars TFU
- ▲ Lego Indiana Jones
- ▲ Wall-E

Source chart-track.co.uk

The PlayStation entertainment plan

Fill up your life with our monthly guide

Monday



Tuesday

JAN 20

James 200 on again
And you're touching its papery face right now. Send emotional Valentine's e-cards and recriminations to open@futurenet.com

Wednesday

Thursday



Friday

23

Board meeting
Smash high scores (and all your bones) as you try to compete with younger, more nimble boarders - Skate 2 hits PS3 today. skate.sony.com

Saturday

Sunday



26

Cruise control
Tom Cruise's funniest role since that leaked Scientology video is in Tropic Thunder, which is released on Blu-ray today. tropicthunder.com

28

Blameless blame
West Ham love losing to underdogs at home - see if Hull City can continue that trend live on Sky. skysports.com

29

Mosh pit
Kerrang's Relentless Tour delivers new rock rascals Black Tide and In Case Of Fire to the Garling Academy in Birmingham. touchkerrang.com

31

London derby
Tune in to MOTD for highlights of Arsenal against West Ham, particularly if henky Wenger inexplicably decides to square up to Iffy Zola. news.bbc.co.uk/sport

FEB 01

Endurostar!
Caress the shiny curves of the world's top bikes at the last day of the MCN Motorcycle Show. londonmotorcycleshow.com



06

Wood work
Woody Allen's Scarlett Johansson/Fenelope Cruz sandwich Vicky Cristina Barcelona is in cinemas today. vicky.cristina-movie.com

07

Portuguese chaises
Portsmouth look to dampen Liverpool's title hopes at Fratton Park. Setanta Sports has live coverage. setanta.com

08

Scrum-ptious
Harlequins face Bradford in the Rugby Super League for another 20 minutes of inappropriate bucking. superleague.rugby



10

Shock rock
The Shockwaves NME Awards Tour hits Lincoln, dragging Glasvegas in its skinny-jeaned wake. last.fm/event/837462



13

Notorious
Order yourself the extra large nachos - the Biggie Smalls biopic Notorious hits cinemas today. foxsearchlight.com/notorious



16

Scottish sounds
Self-proclaimed teenage Dundonian upstarts The View take their new album Which Bitch on tour at the Live Music Hall in Aberdeen. myspace.com/dryburgh

17 Feb
Issue 29 on sale. Subscribe now on page 23

Booky Wook your seat now
Get yourself down to the Plymouth Pavilions to shout 'for shame!' at Russell Brand. plymouthpavilions.com



20

Win an HDTV with Street Fighter IV
Enter our compo for your chance to see Chun-Li's thunder thighs in pristine high definition. streetfighter.com



Hadouken in HD

Win an HDTV with Street Fighter IV

Here comes a new challenger... no wait, it's just the postman with a huge parcel. To celebrate Street Fighter IV's arrival on PS3, we're giving away a Samsung 32" HD ready LCD TV and a copy of the game. Because let's face it, you wouldn't want to hand out a beating in anything less than the optimum conditions. So, all you need to do to be in with a chance of winning is answer the following question about our favourite female fighter...

What is Chun-Li's profession when she's not fighting?

A SUSHI CHEF **B DIAMOND THIEF** **C INTERPOL AGENT**

Text using the word 'Street' followed by a space, then your answer A, B or C followed by a space, then your name and address to 87474. Or enter at futurecomps.co.uk/28street. Winners will be picked at random from all correct entries. Closing date 17.02.09

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FIVE MINUTE SKIVE

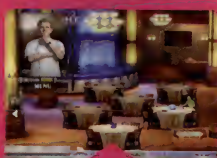
Games to play when the boss isn't looking



Mirror's Edge 2D

Get to know Faith properly before you start throwing her off buildings on your PS3. While this 2D version isn't as beautifully stylised as the full game it is slightly less likely to induce sick-in-the-mouth vertigo.

snipurl.com/7rw2g



Hell's Kitchen

This will teach you absolutely nothing about cooking for micro-celebs but absolutely will fulfil that fantasy you have about Gordon Ramsay shouting at you. "Self-promoting Flash game. Done."

snipurl.com/7rw37



The Scruffs

This is a lot like playing I-Spy at a rubbish tip. In real life you'd be calling the local council on the Scruffs' crap-collecting asses, but here it's your job to sift through their junk. Wait, is that Lord Lucan's head?

snipurl.com/7rw3g



FIVE YEARS AGO IN OPM

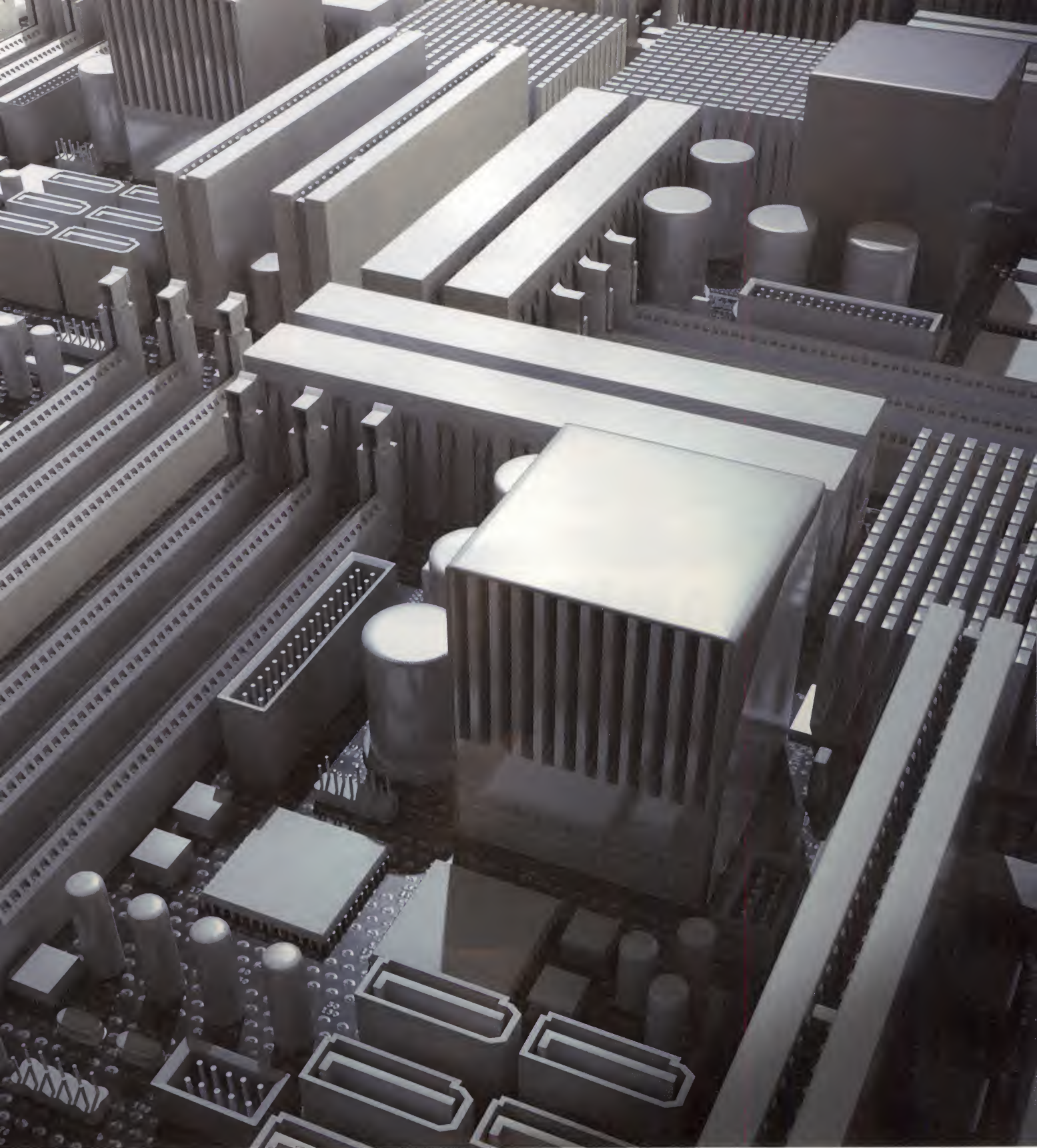
This month we visit OPS2 #43

'Shoot the world with **SOCOM III**!' we screamed charitably from the cover of issue 43, which featured a night-vision Navy SEAL and a really big gun, all in celebration of our world exclusive review. The special forces shooter scored a respectable 8/10, with the terrifying recommendation that this was a game which 'holds a 9mm at your head' and dares you to get online.

The big story in news was **Star Wars: Battlefront**, this being in the days before Vader's internet-wow 'Do Not Want' moment finally crushed the lingering remnants of our love for George Lucas' ruined series. Following close behind was the shock announcement of PS2's soon-to-be-worst brawler and most misguided movie tie-in of all time, **Fight Club**, word that Killzone developer Guerrilla was working on another shooter called **Shellshock: Nam '67**, and a first look at modified car also-ran **Juiced**.

Previews, meanwhile, was stacked with a series of big sequels as we looked tomorrows to 2004. There was light-footed spy follow-up **Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow** ('It should make you feel like a creep. In a good way'), silent killer for hire **Hitman: Contracts** ('Our trigger fingers are already twitching') and the sadly no longer online **Resident Evil: Outbreak** ('Start praying, people').

And aside from SOCOM, reviews featured big 9s for **James Bond 007: Everything Or Nothing** ('An absolute classic - it's just a shame there's no option to play as Connery') and **Final Fantasy X-2**, a slightly sad 7 for **Max Payne 2** ('ultimately this feels like a badly missed opportunity') and a totally deserved 2 for **Robocop** ('the most pointless waste of £40, ever').



Without your computer expertise we wouldn't get off the ground.

The RAF uses some pretty impressive hardware. As a result, we rely on some even more impressive software. We need ICT Specialists to supervise and oversee one of the biggest, most technologically advanced networks in the world. This net needs to draw in all available battle information and link it to our aircrafts' weapons systems. It isn't only vital to the RAF. It's vital to the country. Simply put, without you, the RAF can't take off.

Text ICT followed by your email address to 88RAF (88723)
rafcareers.com



The Royal Air Force values every individual's unique contribution, irrespective of race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation or social background. Usual network charges apply.



Preview

46 SUPERCAR CHALLENGE

It's the motoring equivalent of being backstage at a Victoria's Secret catwalk show: you want to try them all, preferably at the same time.

PlayStation® Official Magazine - UK Previews

PS3
037

Latest info on Planet PlayStation's hottest games

Worried this month's Previews section looks a bit Kate Bosworth? (Pretty, but worryingly thin.) That'll be because we've scooped out a lot of the sexiest stuff for our feature on the 20 hottest games of 2009 – starting on p70. Luckily, there's still gold in these hills...

Like future racer **Fuel** – technically the biggest game ever made, with 14,000km² to tear across. It's similar to *Motorstorm*, only set in an open, always online world where you compete for petrol, which has become an (even more) valuable commodity. Next is **FEAR 2** – it's got guns, creepy children, monsters and big mechs with mini-guns for arms. That's all the boxes ticked, then. Meanwhile, *Ghostbusters* also has a supernatural theme but is a little lighter on the intestinal spatter and unlicensed human experimentation. And finally, rounding things off symmetrically, there's more motoring with *Supercar Challenge*, a sequel to *Ferrari Challenge* that adds a crucial new ingredient: other cars.



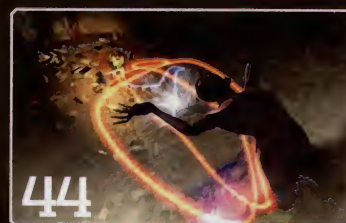
38 **FUEL**

Think petrol is expensive now? At least you don't have to drive for miles across a semi-apocalyptic wasteland, winning races to fill your tank. It was premium unleaded you wanted, right?



42 **FEAR 2**

If you could exorcise scary demon children with a machine gun then *The Exorcist* would have been a completely different film. Let's see how these guys get on... Mind the sick!



44 **GHOSTBUSTERS**

Ecto-1's wailing siren and the proton packs' snaking electro death beams are spot on. But will the ghost of film tie-ins past return to haunt this effort?



Preview

The Next Big Thing **Format** PS3 **ETA** Spring **Pub** Codemasters **Dev** Aspin Studios

Fuel

△ Peak ○ Oil × Google □ Maps



Can't wait?
Play these



Motorstorm Pacific Rift

(PS3, Sony)
More linear than Fuel, but boasting a similar spread of mentalist vehicle classes and jostly pack racing.



Burnout Paradise

(PS3, EA)
Like Fuel, Paradise blends a race-prepped free-roaming map with persistent online to great effect.

Quick pitch

Gathering storm

Global warming has devastated the US. Adrenaline junkies now race for fuel and laughs.

How far?

Fuel's map is the largest ever made in a game. It's open from the start and takes hours to cross.

Area manager

Fuel has a persistent online mode, enabling you to meet up with mates for races.

**EXCLUSIVE
SHOTS**
PlayStation®
Official Magazine - UK



▲ The map contains some 100,000km of roads, but that doesn't mean you have to stick to them.

This isn't game development, it's self-harming in slow motion. You see, rather than bash out a dozen or so tracks for Fuel, its global crisis-flavoured racer, the team at Asobo Studios decided to make 14,000km² of entirely free-roaming terrain, crisscrossed by some 100,000km of highways, roads and dirt tracks. That's a playable area the size of Northern Ireland and the largest yet created in a game. And



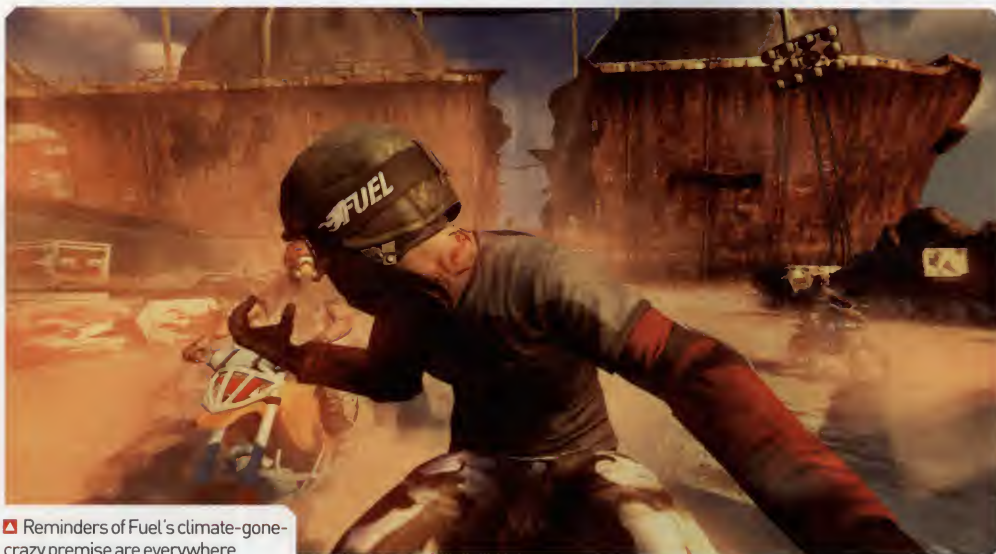
▲ Above all, handling is designed to be fun. With a map as big as Fuel's, it needs to be.

it's rammed with a greatest hits blend of mountains, canyons, deserts, parks and lakes from across the US. Then there's a 40km draw distance streaming, load-free, from your PS3 at all times, and 70+ vehicles from bikes to heavy trucks via quads, muscle cars, buggies and dragsters with which to tear around 70 career races and 200 or so challenges. As driving playgrounds go, Fuel's isn't just big, it's epic. Still, as Just Cause

(which boasted a 'mere' 1,012km²) demonstrated on PS2, fail to fill your map with enough actual *game* and no amount of geographical showboating is going to keep players hooked. So how will Fuel be different?

You are here

Part of the answer lies in the way the engine powering the game has freed the dev team to focus on what matters. Conceived by Asobo's chief exec Sebastian Wloch in 2002, and developed and refined since then, the engine takes satellite imagery (or a blend of several images as is the case in Fuel), renders it as 3D terrain and then, working from parameters such as humidity, altitude and gradient, 'dresses' it with the appropriate greenery, snow and textures. Even more cleverly, the engine draws in a credible network of roads and creates hundreds of potential race routes from this. If it sounds like an appallingly impersonal way to develop a racer, you'd be right, but this is only the start of the process. Rather than slave away building every last contour of a game world from scratch, the team at Asobo has taken its engine-generated map filled with hundreds of events, and slaved away, instead, on perfecting it, optimising the world for exploration ►



▲ Reminders of Fuel's climate-gone-crazy premise are everywhere.

039



Preview

EXCLUSIVE
SHOTS
PlayStation
Official Magazine - UK



❑ You don't pull off stunts yourself in Fuel, but get enough air and your rider *will* show off.

and ruthlessly whittling down the career events and painstakingly refining the ones that remain. In short, the tech has enabled Asobo to make a massive world for Fuel in record time and concentrate on getting the actual game right and full of fun stuff.

Fun, how?

In practice this means knockabout, Motorstorm-style multi-class pack racing on and off-road, with generous handling that isn't afraid to spank you if you push it too hard. Career events are based around population hubs and

include point-to-point Time Trials, Checkpoint dashes, Circuit races and Raids, in which competitors leather it across the countryside to a distant finishing point however they see fit. Supplementing these, and dotting the countryside, are the game's 200 challenges – special events such as elimination races, helicopter chases (with you on the ground), huge Raid runs and aggressive shunting bouts where you have to take out an opponent by wrecking their ride before the clock ticks down to zero. The map



❑ Vehicles have an on, off or all-road bias. Whether you ignore that or not in the dash for the finish is key to Fuel's fun.

is also dotted with wrecks from which you can collect rare new liveries for your vehicles, and Vista Points – hard to reach locations that earn you kudos and spectacular views.

Fuel is also being developed with persistent 16-strong online multiplayer in mind. Choose to join an online free ride (you can play offline if you choose) to challenge mates to races, hunt out Vista Points or just cane it around the world recreating scenes from Smokey And The Bandit. Cleverly, should you wander far enough away from the pack, Fuel will seamlessly log you out

The map It's time to get lost in Fuel's massive playground



You'd think that given the sheer scale of Fuel's world – 14,000km² – the graphical quality would be scrappy.



However, its bespoke engine means that from Monument Valley to Lake Powell via Close Encounter's Devil's Tower, the streaming game world looks almost impossibly lush.



▲ Raid races promise to be the most fun: no-checkpoint cross-country sprints for up to eight.



▲ Population hubs are where you'll find events, shops and chopper pads.

of that region of the map and into the next, with a fresh group of drivers waiting to school you. Still worried you might get bored? Fuel will also come with a race designer, enabling you to drag and drop checkpoints around the entire map (or more likely, over a modest but favourite portion of it) creating bespoke events that you can then share with others. And just in case you're having none of this free-roaming nonsense, you can either choose to navigate to event hubs via helicopter – chopper drop is also how you swap between vehicles in your collection – or even skip seamlessly from one career event to the next, forgoing exploration entirely.

Of course, with five months to go, it's impossible to say whether Fuel will make good on its huge promise. That said, having spent a morning speeding over its hills and far away, there is genuine reason to believe it might. The handling – we tried bikes and buggies – flatters without making your driving skill (or lack thereof) redundant; the world, complete with shifting types of terrain, day/night cycle and dynamic weather looks amazing; and the clever GPS – it swoops overhead like the rails of a suspended rollercoaster – means the scale of the map never feels daunting. See you at the top of Mt Rainier then? It's two and a half hours drive north of the Grand Canyon...

Dev talk



"Initially we wanted to have a world that was five times bigger, so we had a list of hundreds of landmarks. We then selected a list of 30 that we wanted to keep."
Sebastian Wloch
Chief exec,
Asobo Studios

Can't Wait To Play...



Industry insiders reveal their PS3 faves

Jacob Minkoff
Lead designer, Blue Omega Ent

Dark Void



"This one's near to my heart. Like my own game, Damnation, it's built on the Unreal Engine 3, it's retro-futuristic, and it has vertically-oriented shooting and climbing. At the same time, it's a totally different take on the 'vertical shooter' concept. I'm stoked."

Heavy Rain

"Quantic Dream's Fahrenheit was a revelation. Still, it felt like they ran out of development time towards the end. That's why I can't wait to see what happens when that team has the might of Sony behind them."



Final Fantasy XIII



"I can't think of a single top-tier series that takes more risks than Final Fantasy. The games consistently innovate and re-invent their core systems with every iteration."



Preview

Quick pitch

Tin man

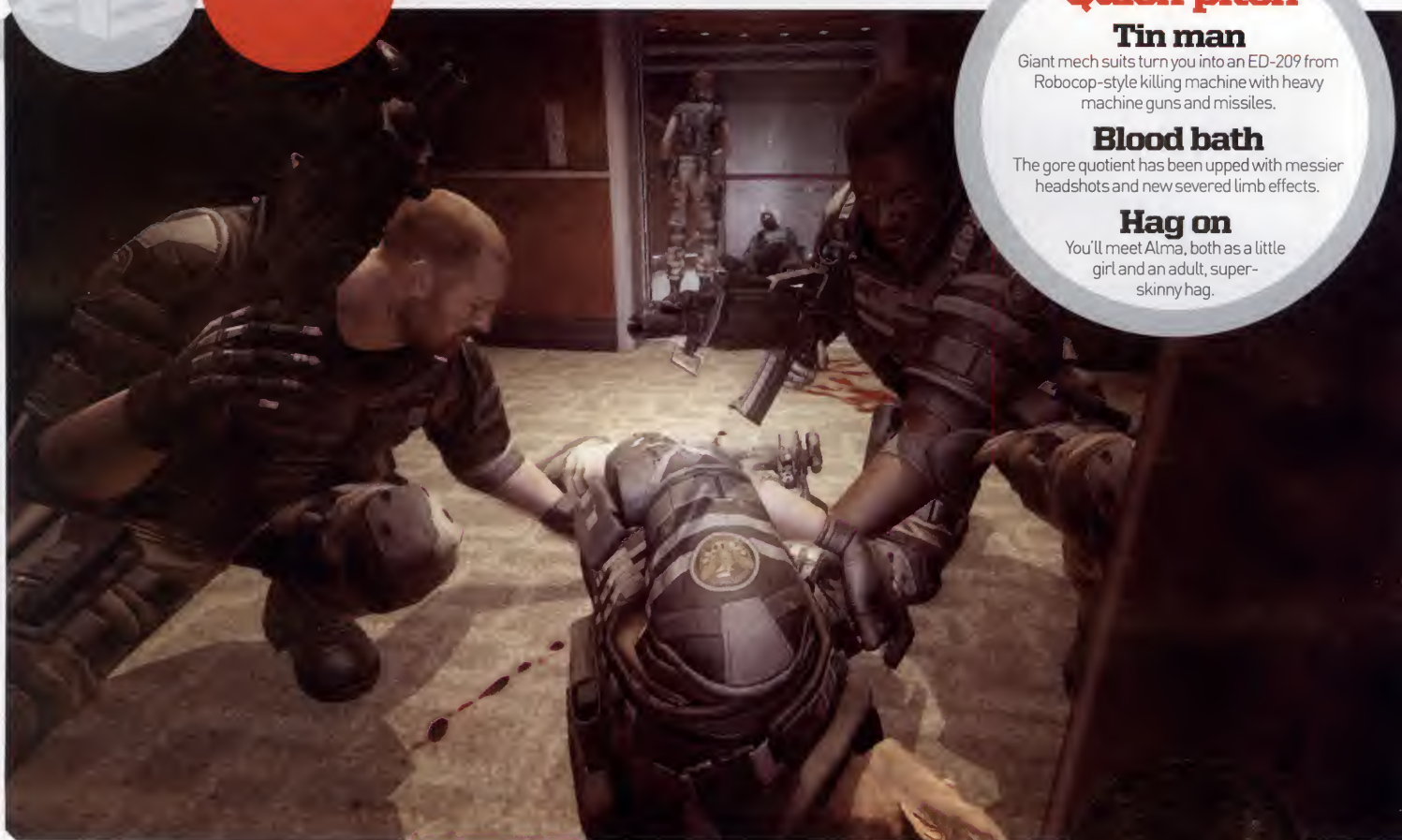
Giant mech suits turn you into an ED-209 from Robocop-style killing machine with heavy machine guns and missiles.

Blood bath

The gore quotient has been upped with messier headshots and new severed limb effects.

Hag on

You'll meet Alma, both as a little girl and an adult, super-skinny hag.



Hype Magnet **Format** PS3 **ETA** 13 February **Pub** Warner Bros **Dev** Monolith

FEAR 2 Project Origin

Can't wait?
Play these



FEAR
(PS3, Sierra)
The original might be ancient, but the creepy corridors and supernatural shootouts were an original twist on the FPS setup.



Bioshock
(PS3, 2K Games)
The combination of Splicers, Little Sisters and Art Deco design makes this underwater world a master class in atmosphere

△ Guns ○ Grenades ⊗ Gore □ Girl

It's a classic schoolboy error for any horror sequel. Take all the suspense and tension from the original and blow it all by waving the monster in your face every five minutes. In this case the monster is Alma, the undead psychic child with a tendency to liquidise anyone she doesn't like using *the power of her mind*. One level in and we can't turn a corner without a wobbly screen effect and her shrieking out of the darkness.

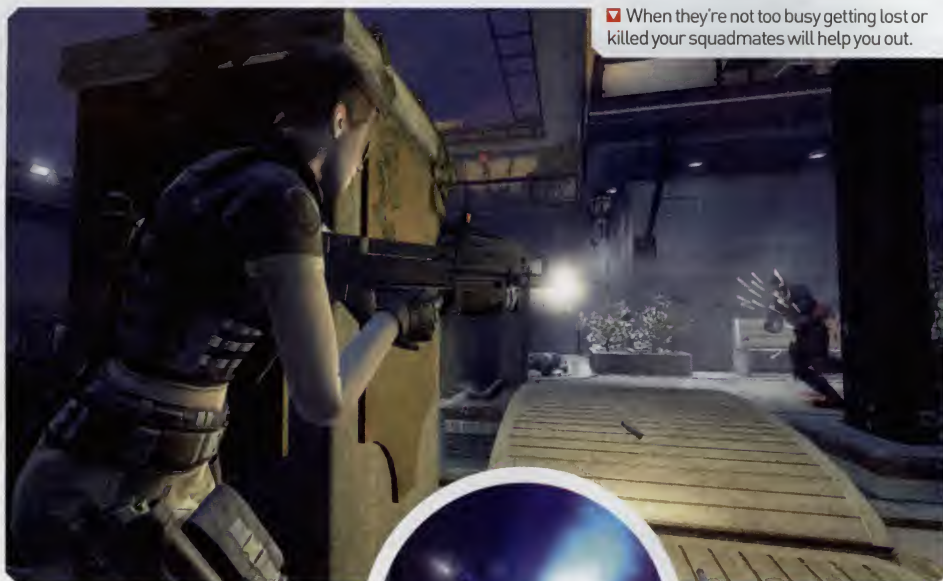
Office politics

The story begins about 20 minutes before the original game ends, but now following a different FEAR (First Encounter Assault and Recon) team as they storm Origin's headquarters – the corporation behind the experiments that created Alma and birthed an army of mindless clone soldiers – to arrest the company's president Genevieve Aristide. New hero Michael Becket still has the

same bullet-time powers featured in the previous game, meaning you can watch enemies disintegrate in slow motion, but he's now also got Snakefist power armour – a giant invincible mech suit. It's slow but sucks up enemy fire while enabling you to blast anything that moves with heavy-duty missiles.

Exploring the early levels, set in the Origin facility and an abandoned school, the original's sense of dread is noticeably absent. Supernatural enemies like giant tentacles or reanimated dead soldiers all feel overexposed. Battles with enemy troops are more promising, with punchy weapons and excessive gore lending the kills some piquancy. However, while the shooting feels strong, the big sell here should be the scares, but it's hard to feel scared while wearing a giant robot suit. Gun balancing you can tweak, graphics you can improve, but making a game scary in the final month before release? That might be an impossible task.

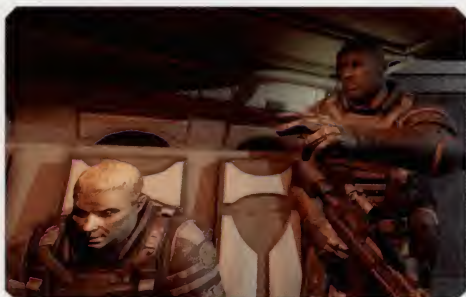




✓ When they're not too busy getting lost or killed your squadmates will help you out.



✗ Kills are less 'realistic', more 'explosion in a jam factory'.



✓ As a child Alma was imprisoned in a research facility. Now she's pretty angry.



✗ Your superhuman reflexes can turn the tawdriest gun battle into a slow-motion gun show.



Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲ Oh. My. God... Of War III

Watching the Greek madman in action reinforces the strength of Sony's exclusives. See also Uncharted 2, GT5 and whatever it is that Team Ico's making.

▲ Nice one, Kun

After three years of failed bids, Sergio 'Kun' Agüero finally signs for us in Master League. And we only had to win the treble and offer him a million magic points to do it.



▲ Killzone 2

Finally COD4 has some *real* competition.

▼ Home honeys

The reception that currently awaits female avatars in Home is like a car workshop in the '70s.



▼ Casualty of war

Call Of Duty: World At War rules the chart with an iron fist despite being, y'know, *much worse* than last year's game.

▼ Hell is...

Dante's Inferno is from the same developer as the brilliant Dead Space - so why does the lead character look like a wizard on the run from one of the Dynasty Warriors games?



Preview

Quick pitch

Team 'buster

Get three mates to join you online and you can play as the entire Ghostbusters squad.

Pay damages

Destroy everything while a tally keeps track of how much the city is coughing up for repairs.

Class act

All the original Ghostbusters are back to do the voicework, including Bill Murray.



Hydro-Magnum | Format PS3 ETA March 2009 | Pub Atari | Dev Terminal Reality

Ghostbusters

△ She's ○ Looking × At □ Me

Things we like: catching a ghost in a particle beam and wrestling it like a supernatural fish, and using the PKE (Psycho Kinetic Energy) meter to follow spectral trails. Things we don't like: 'ghosts made of things' (e.g. books) and the new time-freezing weapon.

Keep it real

When developer Terminal Reality sticks to the source material 'busters looks promising, capturing the feel of the films brilliantly, with ghosts copying the wobbly '80s special effects design and proton packs spitting arcing coils of energy like lazy neon lightning. Trying to trap a spook results in instant carnage as the beams

destroy anything in their path. There are some nice touches as well. The PKE meter now enables you to see and hear spirit traces like a CSI blacklight. While we were tracking a ghost it picked up small glowing handprints on the wall and spooky children's laughter to follow like a trail of bread crumbs.

The problems start, inevitably, when the developer feels the need to stamp its own identity on proceedings. Your role as 'experimental equipment specialist' means you try out new gadgets such as the slime attachment, which fires ectoplasmic tethers to move objects. That, at least, feels like part of the movie and has some great puzzle-solving

potential. But the stasis beam is all sorts of wrong. It slows, then freezes ghosts, enabling you to smash them like glass – it's basically a cut 'n' paste weapon cliché. Then there are the corporeal ghosts – made out of solid objects, like books and hot coals – that must be destroyed rather than trapped. They're just lazy design: a way of extending the gameplay with waves of pointless enemies to fight. Remember the bit in the film where there's a lengthy shoot-out against loads of respawning monsters? Exactly. Too much ho-hum padding like that could spoil things, which would be a shame because the material that sticks close to the source is all looking great.

What happens when you cross streams? Terminal Reality won't let on...yet.





Key ingredients Ghostbusters



1 Cause plenty of destruction.



2 Use your proton beams to trap ghosts.



3 Ghosts appear as they died.



4 New Ghostbuster weapons.

▲ Catching the Librarian from the first movie makes up one of the early levels. "Get her!" still isn't much of a plan.

Could Be A Contender

Witcher: Rise Of The White Wolf



This one sounds like it's going to be a winner

The premise

You are a Witcher, a magically mutated, highly trained monster hunter-come-mercenary.

The reality

It's a fantasy adventure full of swords, spells, enchanted forests and peasants to rescue. (Lazy peasants.)

The hook

There's a huge amount of customisation: 130 abilities, six different combat styles plus magic and alchemy to master.

The inspiration

Wiedźmin, the original Polish novel by Andrzej Sapkowski.

The chances

The PC version of the game scored well, although on PS3 it uses a new control scheme and game engine. Hmm...

Format PS3 ETA Autumn Pub Atari Dev CD Projekt RED



Source: Amazon.co.uk

Pre-Orders The punters' top three



1

Street Fighter IV

Back like an angry Japanese Lazarus, the classic fighting series makes a triumphant return with new characters like Crimson Viper and El Fuerte joining all your old favourites (ie Ryu, and only Ryu).

Format PS3 ETA 20 Feb Pub Capcom



2

Killzone 2

This month's cover game (it's reviewed on p88) sees you taking the fight to the Helghast scum on their home world. And the good news is that it's as brilliant as it is pretty. Which is to say: very.

Format PS3 ETA 27 Feb Pub Sony



3

Tom Clancy's HAWX

Do your fighting in the air as an elite fighter pilot fending off an invading PMC. There are 55 real-world jets on offer with enough high-tech weaponry to make Don Rumsfeld sleep soundly at night.

Format PS3 ETA Mar Pub Ubisoft



Preview

Quick pitch

Men from the boys

Choose your preferred handling style from Simulation, Assist and Arcade.

Top marques

Crash on the first bend in 40 supercars including Lambos, Astons and the Bugatti Veyron.

No, after me...

Rivals will cut you slack or tighten the screws depending on the challenge you pose them.

Crazy horses

The R-GT's performance depends on its gearing (changed to suit specific circuits), but floor your foot in an 'off the shelf' LP640 and its 632 horses will devour 0-60mph in 3.5 secs.



Ultra Lambo

Take a 'vanilla' Lamborghini Murcielago, give it to German race team Reiter Engineering, feed the resulting Biblical poke through the real wheels only (the original is 4WD) and you get this racing spec R-GT.

The hook The cars are the stars

Hungry to race performance metal but far too lazy to run Gran Turismo's gauntlet of lukewarm hatches, whining city cars and charisma-free reprobables to earn the opportunity? Then Supercar Challenge's startlingly rich diet of Pagani Zondas, Aston Martins, Mercedes McLaren SLRs, Bugatti Veyrons, Maseratis, Porsches and racing-spec Ferraris will be right up your street. Cheap and cheerful is simply not an option.



The FXX is an ultra-exclusive track-day Enzo.



There's damage – Gran Turismo, take note.



Subtlety is not Lamborghini's strong point...

The Next... Ferrari Challenge **Format** PS3 **ETA** Spring 2009 **Pub** System 3 **Dev** Eutechnyx

Supercar Challenge

Ⓐ Forget © About ✕ Hyper □ Miling

Say hello to OPM's new wheels. We actually had our hearts set on a 1999 Transit minibus, but the Murcielago R-GT was the closest we could find in Supercar Challenge's

collection of ultra-exclusive rides.

This is developer Eutechnyx's answer to the feedback it received following the impressive but austere Ferrari Challenge. Gone is the single manufacturer setup, replaced by a spread of marques spanning 40-plus cars. The game has also backed off from a slavish devotion to sim-style

handling – it's here, but now there are two less exacting settings that let you make the transition from a real-world Corsa (59bhp) to a virtual Bugatti Veyron (1,001bhp) with minimal damage to bodywork and pride.

Last of all, Ferrari Challenge's perversely dull Challenge mode – 20-minute-races! – has been replaced by a more accessible spread of modes. Although more accessible in the world of supercars is like saying 'made of rubies not diamonds'.

Can't wait?
Play these



Ferrari Challenge

(PS3, System 3)
A little po-faced, perhaps, but a solid, single-marque sim all the same.



Gran Turismo 5 Prologue

(PS3, Sony)
Beautiful like first love – ruinously hard like its demise.



047

The Latest On...

New shots, new games, new info



Stormrise

Format PS3 ETA March Pub Sega

Perhaps it's no surprise that the greyest game ever is tricky too, with a 360° 'whipstick' analogue control system that feels fast but massively complicated to master. Even our resident Starcraft addict found it baffling.



Guitar Hero Metallica

Format PS3 ETA March Pub Activision

Napster-hating, big-riffing rockers get a tracklist that spans their entire career (Master Of Puppets FTW!) plus, erm, some songs played by some of their contemporaries, including Judas Priest, Lynyrd Skynyrd and Alice In Chains.



X-Men Origins: Wolverine

Format PS3 ETA May Pub Activision

Developer Raven (who also made Marvel Ultimate Alliance – boo!) promises "lightning-quick combat, evasive manoeuvres, in-depth combo attacks, and an array of brutal finishing moves". We say, "Nailed on 6/10".



Afro Samurai

Format PS3 ETA 2009 Pub Namco Bandai

A surprisingly fun, seriously violent blend of action and platforming based on the cult Japanese manga show. Today's design lesson: bisecting a man with a samurai sword *never* gets old.



Lumines Supernova

Format PSN ETA Spring Pub Q Entertainment

The best puzzler since Tetris comes to the PlayStation Store. Supernova is a new HD version, complete with LittleBigPlanet skin, and featuring all the sound effects from that game.



Hydrophobia

Format PS3 ETA March Pub Blade Interactive

Senior creative designer Rob Hewson insists this ship-based shooter will be "a unique world free from gaming clichés, and utterly compelling". Lead lady Kate still looks a miserable mare, though.

There's more...

The super-cute, completely bananas **Noby Noby Boy** – the latest work of genius from Katamari creator Keita Takahashi – should hit PSN within days of you reading this. You play a two-headed creature with an extendable abdomen that grows as he interacts with a host of objects. Leaked footage of **MLB 09: The Show** confirmed that the best US sports series going has incorporated progressive lighting and a day/night cycle – so that early evening games gradually turn to night as you play. It's out in March and looks amazing. Peripheral maker Mad Catz is releasing two arcade style controllers for **Street Fighter IV**, which arrives on 20 Feb. We're told that the superior 'Tournament Edition' stick will retail in the region of a Yoga Fire-inducing £120. Koch Media is publishing **Fritz Chess** on PS3 early next year. Given that it's a remake of a DS game, temper any Kasparov-sized expectations right now. Little known publisher Nobilis is bringing a fantasy platformer to PSN next year called **Trine**, which is "set in a world of great castles and strange machinery": **STRANGE MACHINERY!** It's now second on our most wanted in 2009 list. (Tied for first place: everything else.)

Just Cause 2

Format PS3 ETA 2009 Pub Eidos

CIA agent Rico Rodriguez returns for more grapple-hooking, base-jumping action, this time on a Hawaii-like island called Panau, with a far deeper set of missions and an adaptive difficulty system. "Our biggest challenge has been filling the world with meaningful content," admits lead designer Peter Johansson, and it's pleasing to hear – JC1 was huge in terms of scale, but there was bugger all to do half the time.



▲ Rico's 'chute plays a key part in Just Cause 2, dropping you wherever you choose – including a floating brothel.

Next month in...

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Resident Evil 5

The exclusive review
'It's survival horror on safari'

OPM
interview



Leading from the front

Sony Computer Entertainment chairman Kaz Hirai explains why PlayStation 3 isn't competing with Nintendo, why Microsoft can't last the course and how Sony is still leading the industry ►



interview

Kazuo Hirai



**WORLD
EXCLUSIVE
REPORT**
PlayStation.
Official Magazine - UK

Apparently it was your interest in videogames that first brought you to Sony. What sort of games excited you?

The first videogame that I actually spent a lot of time on, and therefore a lot of my allowance, was Space Invaders back in '78 or '79. And many a weekend in my misspent youth, I think I was in junior and senior high school, I'd go down to Shibuya and spend the entire Saturday and Sunday on Space Invaders and that was my introduction into videogames. After I graduated from college I wanted to get into the software industry, but at that point videogames didn't really... it was not a way forward, to be honest. But I was always interested in software, in entertaining content, as opposed to working for a bank or trading firm, or working for just a hardware company. I thought entertaining software had limitless possibilities, and that's why I joined Sony Music, and I was with Sony Music for about 10-11 years when PlayStation was just starting up, and I thought that'd be an even more interesting industry to become involved in. I was still young and Sony was getting into that business as well, so I moved industries within the same company.

It seems like you had a multicultural background travelling with your father - America, Canada. Do you attribute your success to having a greater awareness of the world in general?

My background and the experience I've had as a child really helped, number one, hopefully to communicate freely, at least with the people who speak English. My French is terrible! So if it's Japanese or English, I feel very comfortable, especially with the American English language, I feel I can get to the finer nuances of American English. But also, more importantly than that, I think living in various different countries and going back and forth gave me the ability to look at different things from different perspectives. In other words, if I look at something like this great cover of yours [picks up a copy of OPM]... You're a UK-based magazine, but - this is just as an example - I can put my Japanese hat on to say 'this cover really works with the Japanese market because of X, Y and Z', and I can put my American hat on to say 'I'll tell you why this doesn't work', or 'This also works in the US'. I do that with various business compositions, or with the look and feel of how XMB works, or the design of the PSP - I'm able to do that more readily than some other people.

Describe a typical working day...

The day is predominantly meetings. Both

internal business meetings as well as sitting down with whatever guests happen to be in town. I also spend a lot of time with vendors, or partners, meeting the people who supply the different components for the PS3 or PSP. And then publishers who are in town - we'll have business meetings with them.

What is more important for a console's success, the brand or the tech?

The brand is obviously important from an overall perspective. We usually talk about what the PlayStation experience is, and that's something that you build in over many years.

It's like an arms race sometimes, with everyone trying to keep pace. You have Miis, and avatars in the New Xbox Live Experience and in Home, or Achievements and Trophies...

As far as features like avatars and all those things are concerned, it's not about the avatar, it's about what the avatar actually does as part of the entertainment experience.

"I like to think that PlayStation continues official leadership in this industry."

You need to look at the totality, and as far as the PlayStation business goes - we're obviously using the avatars in a big way with PlayStation Home, so it's more important that we focus on what the Home experience is. Home is the overarching importance, and the avatars and the other things within Home are part of the overall experience.

Where do you think non-gaming content like Home is heading, in terms of interactive experiences?

I think that what I call a 'non-game experience' is going to be a later part of the PlayStation experience, and it's going to be a very important part of our strategy. We'll engage in that, but only if we're sure that we're growing the videogame business and the videogame experience on the PS3 first and foremost. That's our competency, that's our history, that's our tradition. And we will do *nothing* that detracts from the responsibility and the promise of bringing a compelling

videogame experience first and foremost. If we're able to do that, then what we bring to the table in terms of Home, which kind of straddles the game and non-game experience, and Life, which is not really a game but is still an interactive entertainment-information experience - those things will start to shine. Eventually, we'd like to grow to a point where we're going to have consumers who say, 'I bought the PS3 for the great games you have,' and another person who says, 'I bought the PS3 because of Home, oh, and by the way, I found out there's some great videogames in there as well.' We want to expand the demographics from just a videogaming audience to something that's a little bit more massive.

Can you see a point in the future where the PS3 becomes an all-encompassing entertainment hub?

I like to call it an interactive entertainment experience basically. That includes videogames, obviously.

Is it difficult to make software that works all over the world, or do you decide early on to concentrate on specific territories?

I have a lot of trust in [Shuhei] Yoshida, who's the president of the worldwide studio. I've worked with him for many years. As far as portfolio management is concerned - which software titles get produced or created within the Japan, US or European studios - I trust his judgement. I may have my views on bigger pieces of software, but that's why we have professionals like Yoshida and the great people in the worldwide studio. I trust their judgement nine times out of ten, so while I could play a game like Afrika and with my Japanese hat on say 'great title, [but] perhaps in the US and overseas I can see how it could face some challenges', I still think we did the right thing by making [it]. It's done a great job here in Japan of trying to articulate another way of experiencing PS3 in a different form.

Most games use a confrontational format – from Space Invaders onwards – where you have to score points to win. With experiences like Afrika, Life and Home, do you think the technology's opening up the potential for new ways to play?

Absolutely. When this business started technology was such that you had two paddles and a square ball that you hit back and forth. There wasn't much more you could do. Maybe add two more paddles, or two more balls, or whatever. Fast forward to 2006 when we launched the PS3, and today, and I think... if Pong was giving the creators two colours – black and white – right now we're up to 256 million colours and what the artist does with each different colour represents a different nuance that is certainly beyond what anybody would've expected this industry to look like when Pong was released.

If you were to describe Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft with one word each, what would they be?

[Laughs] Very interesting. Let's see. I think that with the PlayStation – one word? You know, this is not meant in terms of numbers, or who's got the biggest install base, or who's selling most or whatever in any particular week or month, but I'd like to think that we continue official leadership in this industry. It's difficult to talk about Nintendo, because we don't look at their console as being competitors. They're a different world, and we operate in our world – that's kind of the way I look at things. And with the Xbox – again, I can't come up with one word to fit. You need a word that describes something that lacks longevity [Laughs].

The point I'm getting across here is we make a commitment to the consumers that when they join the PlayStation family, whether it's with the original PlayStation, PS2 or PS3, you're not joining a family that's going by the wayside in five years. It took ten years to get here. Last time I checked, they've never had a console that's been in the market for more than four or five years and we've committed to a ten year life cycle, so you do the math. And unless things go *really* bad there's no way that at the end of a life cycle our competition is going to have a higher install base.

The firmware updates give you flexibility – you could theoretically change everything, like Xbox 360 recently did. Is that an option?

We won't radically change the experience because we're very happy with the



Who is... Kazuo Hirai

Born in Tokyo in 1964, Hirai travelled widely in his childhood with his father. After he left University in 1984 he joined Sony's newly formed music division, where he promoted foreign music in the Japanese market. He joined Sony's new computer entertainment division in 1995 and worked on the launch of PlayStation in the US. Shortly after the launch of PS3, Hirai was made head of Sony Computer Entertainment.



fundamental GUI [graphical user interface], to the extent that it's being replicated on other Sony devices, like Bravia TVs. I don't think we radically need to change it, but it does allow us that sort of flexibility to change the experience if it's being done for the right reasons. The firmware patches are more to enhance the experience in terms of features and functionality.

How is it possible to futureproof? For example, with Blu-ray, how do you predict what a ten-year life cycle will demand at the end of it?

Well I think Blu-ray can predict the future. I don't want to sound like a mutual fund, but you've got to look at past performance. We had the same questions when we launched the PS1 and PS2. 'What do you mean a ten-year life cycle? The Emotion Engine is cool, but ten years? Give me a break' – that was the prevalent sentiment. It's not easy to to program for the PS3. I wouldn't say it's endless in terms of what the console can do, but we pack so much depth into our consoles that it takes a while for anybody, including first party studios, to really harness the power.

We don't provide the 'easy to program for' console that they want, because 'easy to program for' means that anybody will be able to take advantage of pretty much what the hardware can do, so then the question is what do you do for the rest of the nine and half years? It's a learning process. But the more you scale that learning process the more the hardware will reveal itself. So when you compare the original titles that came out with the launch of PS2 to some of the titles like God Of War, for example, there's a remarkable difference. But you can see how the gameplay experience has improved over ten years. That's the company really harnessing and getting to understand the hardware. And I think it's the same with PS3.

So it's kind of a – I wouldn't say a double-edged sword – but it's hard to program for, and a lot of people see the negatives of it, but if you flip that around, it means that the hardware has a lot more to offer.

On top of that, there's all the online things you can do – both within the games experience as well as the non-games area, as well as some of the non-game content and other services that I talked about earlier, which I think has the potential of expanding the install base for the demographic even further. So there's a lot of potential there, but all of it comes back to great entertainment content – first and foremost.

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Game of the year 2008

You voted, we counted, and
now the results are finally in.
Now let the arguments begin

We love the Game Of The Year voting. With the exception of the odd death threat (always in purple biro), it's our chance to take the pulse of the PlayStation Nation. As this year's entries poured in we saw favourites, dark horses and rank outsiders jostling for the top spot. It's also reassuring to know that our readers have such impeccable taste. So enjoy the next 13 pages – it's your show and it's been a pleasure to put together. You can tell us more about your favourite gaming moments by mailing opm@futurenet.com. But please, no more roadkill in jiffy bags.



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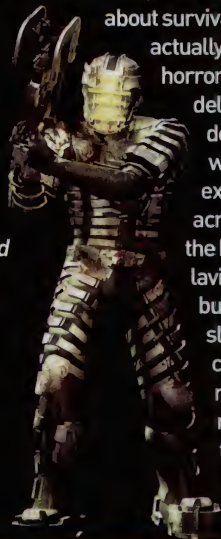
Dead Space was developed by a team that loves horror, and it shows.

Pub EA Dev EA Redwood Shores Score 8/10 Issue 25

Dead Space

This is splattercore

Slash Dead Space open like some kind of swollen alien piñata and its inspirations would come spilling out in a torrent: Resident Evil 4's controls, Metroid's exploration, Event Horizon's gore, Bioshock's craftsmanship – few games have borrowed so much, so obviously, and yet still felt so fresh in the execution. The game reaches beyond the sum of its stolen parts, because this was sci-fi horror made by people who clearly loved sci-fi horror, and understood what makes the genre tick. The team at Redwood Shores also left its own bloody fingerprints all over the design, too. Like the brilliant holo menus and nav system (which draws a glowing go-here-next line on the floor), without which getting around the stricken Ishimura mining ship would be a nightmare, even without the necromorphs to worry about.



Ah, the necromorphs. A lot of BS gets written about survival horror (what kind of giant baby actually got scared while playing a survival horror game on PS1?) but Dead Space delivers genuine, glass-of-iced-water-down-your-back scares. Like every window in a corridor suddenly exploding. Or a mess of flesh scuttling across a suddenly darkened room. And the bosses... oh God, the bosses. The lavish production values – every room bursts with special FX, and not a hint of slowdown – are typical of EA, the commitment to backing an unlicensed new idea is less so, but if this signals a new direction for the super publisher then Dead Space will eventually come to be seen as more important than most of the games on this list.

Devtalk



"I'm happy with how scary Dead Space is. It's extremely hard to keep that level of dread throughout an entire game, but I think we did."
Glen Schofield
Executive producer, Redwood Shores

Fantalk



"There's so much here – it reminded me of The Thing, Event Horizon, 2001, Resident Evil – and most important of all it was the scariest thing I played all year."
Gavin Neale, Leicester

OPMtalk



"It's relentless because there's so little time when a monster isn't trying to drink your brains. Simply put: there's no dead space in Dead Space."
Tim Clark, Editor-in-chief

Best PSP



God Of War: Chains Of Olympus
The gore-hungry Spartan can still woo the action fans, and gets extra points for the cruellest use of a quick-time event ever.



Secret Agent Clank
The bastard son of Bond and a toaster, a tuxedo'd Clank shines in a platformer packed with special gadgets and Clank Fu martial arts.



Locoroco 2
The gaming equivalent of an upper earned a place in the top four with levels set in penguin innards, bouncing blobs and of course, the singing.



Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII
FF really works on PSP – and this confident outing fills in plot gaps and drops turn-based tedium for real-time combat.

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29-81
Machine Gun Rounds

There's a strong case for saying the Big Daddy is the best enemy of this generation.

Pub 2K Games Dev 2K Marin Score 10/10 Issue 25

Bioshock

This must be underwater love

10/10? Not too shabby for a game that some wanted to dismiss for being the 360's year-old sloppy seconds. Clearly, you agreed with us: Bioshock wasn't just unique, it was brilliantly so. A first-person shooter so layered with atmosphere and story that it rarely *felt* like one, even when your trigger fingers ached from frenzied overuse in the face of lolloping Splicer mutants. Its world – the corrupted undersea utopia of Rapture – was so well conceived that memories feel uncannily like those of a real place you've visited. Above all though, it is, as just demonstrated, almost impossible to discuss without slipping into godawful pseudo-intellectual earnestness. But clearly, Bioshock wasn't all atmosphere and fawning over Art Deco flourishes. At its heart, the game's combat was deeper than its big ideas and far more exciting. The weapons were, to a gun,

balanced beautifully, and could be enhanced to your personal tastes, while the mutating Plasmid power-ups were so potent and varied that you couldn't hope to exhaust their potential for exotic kills and skill-blending attacks in a single playthrough. Whether you were duping the game's lumbering Big Daddies into protecting you, inciting enemies to tear one another apart, or softening them up with a swarm of hornets before electrocuting them in shallow water, Bioshock stimulated the imagination as well as the adrenal glands. Even now, there's nothing quite like it on PS3, and we'd put good money on that remaining the case right up until Bioshock 2 hits in December.

Devtalk



"Rapture is a place where there's a very powerful ideology put into play by actual people. And when people get into the mix, things get complicated."

Ken Levine,
Creative director, 2K Boston

Fantalk



"This took the first-person adventure games to a new level. The story was fantastic – I saved all the Little Sisters, the ending was a real treat and quite emotional."

Alex Thompson,
Blackpool

OPMtalk



"Bioshock does a better job of integrating plot and gameplay than just about any other game. Its focus on quality doesn't falter for an instant."

Paul Fitzpatrick
Writer

Best Online Games



Resistance 2
Nathan who? Eight-man co-op and 60-man deathmatches made the single-player game feel like a mere entrée to the online feast.



Call Of Duty: World At War
The class and perks system from COD4 (mercifully) survived intact, plus, you got Zombie Nazis and vehicles.



Burnout Paradise
Streamlined online racing. No lobbies, no wait times, and best of all a mugshot of your enraged opponent's face when you take them out on the road.



Grand Theft Auto IV
15 modes and 15 different ways to outrage the moral majority, all on the familiar streets of Liberty City. Rockstar even added Halloween zombies.

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R2 delivered on the original's promise with supreme confidence.

Pub Sony Dev Insomniac Score 9/10 Issue 25

Resistance 2

If you're going to San Francisco... best bring a Bullseye

Full disclosure: compared to some of the other games on this list (and particularly to the outrageously robust and lavish Killzone 2, reviewed on p88) Resistance 2 doesn't quite measure up visually. It has its money-shot moments – stepping out of a San Fran military facility to see a twinkling armada of Chimeran craft hanging like giant metal fists over the Golden Gate bridge, for one – but it's also inconsistent, with some oddly flat scenery and the occasional lo-res texture that lets down the side.

This is nothing like a deal breaker – in fact, the only reason it's worth mentioning at all is because it's a flaw that shines a light on the far more substantial reasons that Insomniac's XXL shooter scores a big fat win. Basically, it's a matter of scale. Resistance

2 is all about amplification and measures of magnitude, about stacking up huge set-piece after huge set-piece: battling a towering biomechanical giant (in the first five minutes), scrambling to survive against hordes of screeching Grims, and a relentless march of grandstanding boss battles. The narrative stakes are weightier, too, with a

desperate, dying Nathan Hale fighting a doomed rear-guard action in mankind's last stand. And as for the online, it borders on the preposterous, with an impressive, unavoidably messy 60 men piling into each beautifully chaotic deathmatch.

Clearly, Insomniac was thinking big, and in doing so, yes, it may have overlooked a few of the non-essential details. But what the team delivered was a sweeping popcorn epic that carries you open-mouthed from running start to shock conclusion.

Devtalk



"We took real risks with the ending. We could have chosen to wrap things up neatly and have Hale save the world but that would be the easy way out."

Ted Price,
President,
Insomniac Games

Fantalk



"Gripping from start to finish. From the OTT guns to genius co-op mode – every moment fills you with adrenaline. I couldn't put the pad down."

Charlie Lewis,
London

OPMtalk



"A hugely ambitious shooter that capitalises in every way on the promise showed by the original, and still has the nuts to try incredible new things."

Nathan Dittum,
Review editor

Best PSN



Wipeout HD

It's still not for the faint hearted, but add blistering 1080p to the neon tracks and light speed racing and this is more of an attractive proposition than ever.



Siren: Blood Curse

The episodic format fits the splattercore story a treat. Told from different perspectives, the story of sight-jacking and shufflers is genuinely scary.



Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix

No, it's not nostalgia blurring our vision, this remake really is that good. The new HD visuals are just the icing on the cake.



Ratchet & Clank: Quest For Booty

A generous extra course of platforming perfection. It proved PSN wasn't just for quirky low-budget startups, after all.

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First-person free running was a brave choice, but it works.

Pub EA Dev DICE Score 9/10 Issue 25

Mirror's Edge

Misunderstood genius

Mirror's Edge split opinions like an unusually sexy hatchet last year, so it's heartening to see it here and know that we've got such right-minded readers. But let's deal with the reasons people *didn't* like it, first. So it was too short, a bit repetitive, the conspiracy story was weak like a kitten's burp, and when you missed the same jump a dozen times on the spin it could get unbelievably frustrating. All those things are true, but none of them diminish what remains unquestionably one of the freshest, most stylish experiences on PS3.

Against all odds, fusing high-speed platforming with the first-person perspective worked brilliantly – planting you in the split-toed trainers of Faith as she jumped, rolled and slid over gleaming futuristic rooftops. The stark design, simple controls and icy score meant every

aspect of the production felt coherent and forward-thinking. More than that though, the hit of adrenaline as you power through the levels, and the genuine sense of peril as you were hunted by the fascist pigdogs, made it one of the few games that deserves to be called immersive. Worrying, then,

that it failed to find a wider audience, and was misunderstood by so many reviewers

who couldn't get over the lack of guns.

Happily, plans for a follow-up are still in place. "That one's going to go

forward," revealed EA overlord John

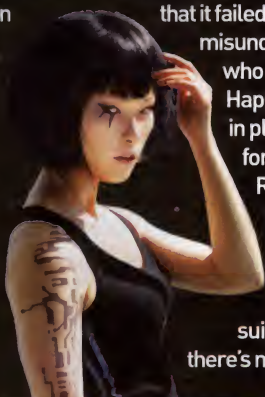
Ricciello, although he did caution

that "We'll be looking at some issues around the design". Still haven't tried Mirror's Edge? Now

that it's been expanded with a

suite of bracing new DLC levels

there's never been a better time.



Devtalk



"We set out to create a game that celebrated the physicality of the character rather than size of their gun. A game where you felt every step and every moment."

Tom Farrer,
Producer, DICE

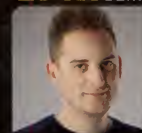
Fantalk



"I love the artistic style, and the feeling of leaping from rooftop to rooftop at dizzying speeds is surreal. Creative and beautiful, this is an instant classic."

Ali Osman,
London

OPMtalk



"I got more flak for this than anything else in '08, but I loved it when I first played it and still do. It's sad innovation is rejected so casually by some."

Tim Clark,
Editor-in-chief

Most Innovative



FIFA 09

10 vs 10 online play has some issues – lag, wonky AI if you don't have nine human team-mates – but it's still a colossal step forward for football games.



LittleBigPlanet

Yes it's time-consuming and a ballache when you mess up (i.e. all the time) but the ability to create and share your own levels is utterly revolutionary.



Mirror's Edge

The term 'FPS platformer' initially sounded like a gaming death knell, yet DICE nailed the concept with grace, style, and a hell-hot leading lady.



Endwar

Makes yelling into a headset more fun and fulfilling than we imagined it could be. "Unit One, attack Hostile Four! Wait, sh*t. All units, RETREAT!"

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Paradise is an outstanding example of how DLC adds value.



Pub EA Dev Criterion Score 9/10 Issue 14

Burnout Paradise

The best racer on PS3 - and it's still not finished...

Burnout Paradise is a bit like the universe, if the universe was a teetering-on-unplayably fast racer obsessed with the slow-motion purity of destruction: it just keeps expanding. It's a massive testament to the game's longevity, and developer Criterion's ruthless, visionary devotion to seamless online play, that even though it was originally released back in January 2008 Burnout still topped many of your year's best lists. We awarded it a 9/10 on release purely on the strength of the boxed content - the crisscrossing complexity of its glorious open world, the flawless sun-flare visuals, its punishing, relentless pace - and that was before we knew anything about the frankly extraordinary post-release support, which has so far brought a stack of new modes, terrifying night racing, and suicidal motorbikes (for free), and will shortly deliver an entirely new

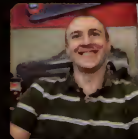
island neighbour to Paradise City (for a one-off fee).

All of which no doubt explains a large part of why so many of you are still playing Burnout 12 months after it first appeared. But the reason you started playing in the first place is that it's everything a next-gen sequel should be. It takes the series' established areas of expertise - accessible handling, idiot speed, crunching chassis violence - and lifts them out of a linear race-by-race context and into a revolutionary, open, online environment. Designing your own races, dropping in and out of friends' games or freeburning across town you can almost feel the limits of the old technology

dissolving away to be replaced by the near limitless potential of the new. And it's still not done, so don't bet against Paradise being in the top ten games of 2009 too.



Devtalk



"We spent a long time figuring out what was the optimum open world experience and what that meant for Burnout."

Pete Lake,
Senior producer,
Criterion Games

Fantalk



"The game that keeps on giving - for free. Moving from four wheels to two was a masterstroke and added even more speed to the most turbocharged game on the block."

John Cole,
London

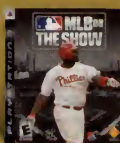
OPMtalk



"A technical marvel that's perfect whether you want an hours-long session or a five-minute blast, with the best dev support of any game on PS3."

Nathan Dittum,
Reviews editor

Best Imports



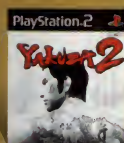
MLB 08: The Show

Great looking, uber-realistic, and a dream to play, this is the best sports game on PS3. Yet there's still no release for the series over here. Boo!



Rock Band 2

Essential plastic peripheral good times, with a huge catalogue of DLC - but why the frustratingly long wait for a UK release again?



Ryu Ga Gotoku Kanzan

A brilliantly told story and fulfilling, artery-slicing swordplay are the highlights of the third game in the cult Yakuza series.



NCAA Football 09

The best gridiron game going, with authentic college football on the field, and hugely fun RPG-style recruiting of high school hotshots off it.

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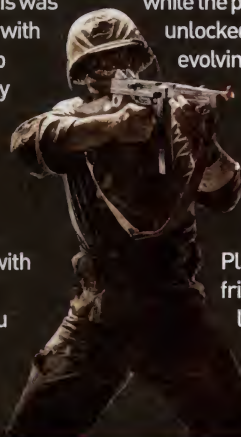
WAW's weapons were 50 years old, but still kicked ass.

Pub Activision Dev Treyarch Score 8/10 Issue 26

COD: World At War

A step backwards for the series, maybe, but still old gold

It says a lot about the quality of the Call Of Duty series that despite a two-point drop in score (World At War notched 8/10 compared to Modern Warfare's 10/10) and a late November release, this still received a hefty pile of GOTY votes. This was stern stuff, playing on the 'horrors of war' with torture, explosions, blood and guts in 720p abundance. But despite the lack of subtlety it still delivered excitement and heart-pounding shootouts on a grand scale. Storming Berlin with your bloodthirsty Russian comrades is one of the series' standout moments. The return to a WW2 setting didn't diminish the impact, either, with the guns tweaked to be as lethal as their modern day counterparts. So whether you were clutching a single-shot Garand or a Thompson Submachine gun it felt like COD the second you pulled the trigger.



Where WAW distinguished itself from Modern Warfare was with its online options. As always the multiplayer was a brutal sensory assault of short, sharp matches that tested nerves and reactions while the perks, weapons and equipment, unlocked as you earned XP, kept the game evolving. Vehicles were another addition, but there were also subtle tweaks to the maps, adding larger, open arenas that provided room to manoeuvre, extending the action. It's the four-player online co-op, however, that really delivered innovation.

Playing through the campaign with three friends was one of the year's highlights – likewise the inspired, bonus Zombie Nazis mode in which you defended a bunker from waves of undead SS. So good it should be a full game.

Devtalk



"We set out to make our own game, something that didn't need numbers and could stand on its own as part of the COD franchise."

Mark Lamia,
Studio head,
Treyarch

Fantalk



"It may not have COD4's sexy modern weapons but World At War delivered a big-budget shooter that was every bit as exciting. The Zombie mini-game was a stroke of genius too."

Gemma Head,
Bath

OPMtalk



"Not the strongest in the series but still a great game in its own right and one of the best first-person shooters of the year."

Leon Hurley,
Commissioning editor

Biggest disappointments



Haze

High expectations turned into disbelief when Free Radical's sub-Halo mistake arrived. Tragically, it seems to have triggered the dev's recent collapse.



Sonic Unleashed

Only disappointing in the same sense as a wayward child's final, severing act of betrayal. We fervently hoped the hog would come good. He didn't.



Need For Speed Undercover

In the year that EA turned around its ailing franchises and brought us some brilliant new ideas, NFS only got weaker.



Army Of Two

Not dreadful, but also not the meaty mid-year highlight we hoped for. Fudgy controls and so-so graphics saw it slip quietly into the night.

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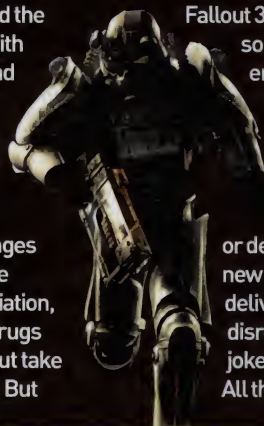
■ Hate elves? Fallout 3 is the RPG it's okay to be seen with.

Pub Bethesda Dev Bethesda Score 9/10 Issue 26

Fallout 3

Ghouls, guns and gore

There might have been glimpses of Oblivion's scaffolding underneath Fallout 3's post apocalyptic wasteland, but the moment you first burst a giant super mutant's head like a rotten melon, all thought of wizards and unicorns was forgotten. The brilliance of Fallout 3 is that it delivered the immersion and freedom of Oblivion with none of the nonsense, choosing instead to tell a brutal tale of survival in an irradiated USA. Every stranger had a story, and more often than not a mission, so there was tons to do even if you ignored the main quest. Just surviving threw up interesting challenges – eating and drinking would accelerate healing, but would also raise your radiation, eventually to lethal levels. Similarly, drugs like Jet would give you quick boosts, but take too much and you'd become an addict. But



that's Fallout 3 all over – choices everywhere, most of which were a compromise of sorts.

More than anything it felt like a proper adventure. While other offline, single-player games hit the trade-in pile the minute they were done, with

Fallout 3 you always had the sense that there was some part of the map you didn't explore enough first time around – another little town, or a mysterious trader with a tale to tell. It's only now that we've found time to enjoy the parts of the game we rushed through early on – like finding schematics to build our own weapons, or decorating our Megaton apartment with new furniture. Whatever your fancy, Fallout 3 delivered. Mutants, zombies, ladies of disrepute – even robotic butlers who crack jokes, dispense drinks and trim your bangs. All that, and Liam Neeson for a dad.

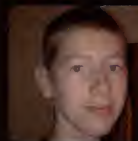
Devtalk



"Part of what makes Fallout great is this powerful juxtaposition of a positive alternate 1950s view of life pre-nuclear war with the reality after."

Peter Hines,
Vice president,
Bethesda

Fantalk



"The main story is engrossing and offers breathtaking scenes. The superb side missions coupled with the main quest mean it lasts for almost 100 hours."

Kaleb Beard,
Bristol

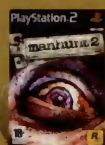
OPMtalk



"Even when you finish the main quest there's still half the map to explore, and it will be different depending on whether you're good or bad."

Rachel Weber,
Agenda editor

Best PS2 Games



Manhunt 2

Finally here, with – whisper it – minimal gameplay cuts and the same savage irony that made the original a classic. Not quite as good, but not far off either.



Guitar Hero World Tour

Weirdly, the Guitar Hero games don't seem to need all that much processing power, as this ace last-gen party treat proved.



Yakuza 2

It took so long to arrive from Japan (nearly two years) that it presumably swam here, but it was still one of the year's highlights, ambitious, deep, and fighty.



Persona 3

Stop, no, wait! It's not as dull as it looks – so long as you like levelling up, killing demons and, er, going to school. Seriously, it's really good. Oh whatever.

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▲ As GTA IV showed, 'more' doesn't always mean 'bigger'

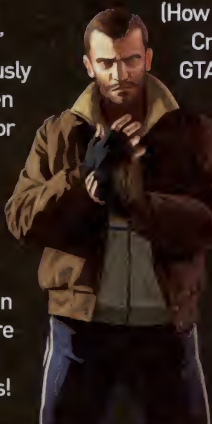
Pub Rockstar Games Dev Rockstar North Score 10/10 Issue 18

Grand Theft Auto IV

We finally found that special someone

The strangest thing in a year full of strange (what's that? A 50 Cent *sequel*?) was the mini-backlash against GTA IV. The reviews were as glowing as always – like Christmas decorations in Chernobyl – but post-release there was a surprisingly high number of dissenting voices on the message boards. 'Not different enough.' 'Too serious.' 'Weak soundtrack.' Obviously we were amazed, and only more so when Saints Row 2 started picking up praise for the opposite reasons, despite, to our eyes, it clearly lacking any of the wit, class or style of its obvious inspiration.

So, with the benefit of hindsight where do we stand now? In exactly the same place, of course. GTA IV remains an astonishing achievement. Perhaps, more than anything, because it eschewed the gimmickry of San Andreas – parachutes!



BMXs! Being fat! – focusing instead on strong characterisation, storytelling and improving every single aspect of the gameplay, from the now-brilliant shooting, through the deliciously hefty car handling to the miraculous sat-nav. (How did we ever manage without it?)

Crucially, in Niko, Roman, Brucie and the rest, GTA IV also had the funniest, most likeable cast of any instalment yet and, in the rebuilt Liberty City, the most incredible location of any game of this generation so far. The worry now is that there will be a battle for control of GTA's soul, fought between those who want ever more oddball features and the current direction, concentrating on even greater detail and depth. As always, we expect the team at Rockstar North to stick to their considerable guns.

Devtalk



"The thing is, 'Does it resonate with people and take an interesting place in their cultural fabric?' That's an interesting story to us."

Dan Houser,
Co-founder,
Rockstar Games

Fantalk



"Excellent story, believable and lovable characters, and lots of subtle improvements over previous GTAs like the weather effects."

Steven Higgins,
Ayrshire

OPMtalk



"The most completely realised world on PS3 and, more than just a staggering piece of technical work, for our money it's also the greatest GTA game."

Tim Clark,
Editor-in-chief

Best party games



SingStore

Makes arguing over which track to buy next almost as fun as the karaoke itself. "Bowling" "No, Blur!" "Stop it, both of you, or it'll be Sandi Thom."



Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix

Because there's no better way of drunkenly humiliating a close friend than shellacking his M Bison with your Zangief.

Guitar Hero World Tour

Pound out classics like Livin' On A Prayer and Beat It with mates. (Don't forget to put the one you secretly don't like on bass.)



Pain

Passing the pad around to see who can inflict the most damage upon a virtual David Hasselhoff? Essential. Unless you live in Germany.



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■ LBP makes recreating your fevered cheese dreams easy.

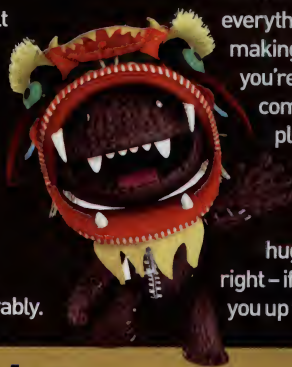
Pub Sony Dev Media Molecule Score 10/10 Issue 24

LittleBigPlanet

If you build it, they will play

Within days of the LBP beta starting it was obvious that this wasn't just a classic game in the making, it was a whole new way of making classic games – the creative power to build and create anything from simple platformers to a working version of Tetris. A quick scan of Youtube reveals an array of brain-achingly impressive, original creations. What other game can boast that?

But despite these incredible feats of felt engineering, the key to LBP's success is that no single concept is hard to grasp – switches turn on and off, wheels spin, motors whirl. The clever bit is that you can link as many of these basic units together as you need to, creating something as simple or as complex as you want. It's made even easier to grasp thanks to the lush, tactile physics that let everything drop, squash or bounce believably.



In short, if you can make toilet roll binoculars in real life, you can build something in LittleBigPlanet too.

Best of all, LBP is a truly community-driven game. Not only can you play with PS3 owners worldwide but there are endless levels online to be discovered, enjoyed and learned from. It's one of the best structured network modes around; creations download in seconds while everything's tagged, rated and linked, making browsing a breeze. And even if you're not feeling that creative, LBP comes with a huge, brilliant single-player game. Not only does it provide great examples of what can be achieved once you've mastered the creation system, but it's a hugely entertaining game in its own right – if the meerkat disco doesn't cheer you up then nothing will. Ever.

Dev talk



"The important thing for me is everyone here is really proud of what we've worked on. I'd be happy to show it to my son. I'm so proud to be a part of that."
Mark Healey
Creative director,
Media Molecule

Fan talk



"Quite simply, there is nothing else like it. It has character and charm in spades, and most importantly, it's brilliant fun. I'm off to play it now!"
Stephen Tailby,
Guernsey

OPM talk



"One of the most important games of this generation. Simple, yet versatile tools mean endless potential while there's a huge online community to play with."
Leon Hurley,
Commissioning editor

Surprising omissions



Guitar Hero World Tour

The best rock game on PS3, but going up against Rock Band clearly split the vote – and ultimately, both missed out on the top ten.



Race Driver Grid

Hands down PS3's most authentic and entertaining driving game, and a summer number one – but still too niche to earn your votes, it would appear.



Soulcalibur IV

Turns out being the most accomplished fighter on PS3, with near endless customisation options, was enough to earn it one vote. Harsh.



FIFA 09

EA's improved licence monster got more votes than team favourite PES 2009, but still missed out on a top ten spot. What gives, football fans?

feature

Game of the year

PS
064

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▲ Snake's swansong was your top game of '08. A fitting tribute.

Pub Konami Dev Kojima Productions Score 10/10 Issue 19

Metal Gear Solid 4 Guns Of The Patriots

Game Of The Year? Not bad for a pensioner with a Magnum moustache

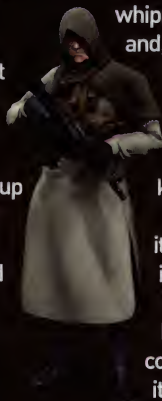
That it's no big surprise that MGS4 is your game of the year is the biggest surprise of all. Just think about it. Here's a game whose two main protagonists aren't buff young space marines, but wrinkly *old* men. The supporting cast, meanwhile, features a vampire, a soldier who craps himself at the first sign of danger and a tab-smoking monkey in silver Speedos. The in-joke heavy plot is largely unintelligible to anyone not well-versed in the series' mythology, and its creator – a self-confessed movie nut – regularly forces players to watch *hour-long* cut-scenes. Just imagine trying to get that little lot greenlit in the current economic climate...

The reason why MGS4 overcomes its eccentricities is that, instead of simply tying up the spaghetti explosion of narrative threads left dangling in previous Metal Gears – an impressive feat in itself – Hideo Kojima used each of the game's five acts to evolve the series' core stealth gameplay. MGS4 introduced adaptive camouflage, a robot sidekick, bespoke soundtracks via an

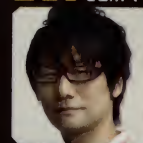
in-game iPod, chaotic war zones complete with running gun battles, Stress and Psyche meters, Third Man-style trenchcoat espionage, zombies, mech-on-mech sparring and a war economy that, depending on your proclivity for 'going loud' and racking up the body bags, affected the price you bought or sold new weaponry for.

Then, just to up the ante even more, Kojima decided to return to Shadow Moses – the blizzard-whipped setting for the original Metal Gear Solid – and, against all odds, improved on it, making Snake's ghosts and memories the seasoned player's too. Meanwhile the quartet of supermodel bosses struck a perfect balance between next-gen innovation and knowing nods to old adversaries.

Now, just as when we first reviewed MGS4, it's clear that this is not a flawless game, but the imperfections are inextricably bound to what makes it great. From the live action channel-hopping opener to the poignant post-credits conversation, it's an astounding game that, like its hero, makes every last second count.



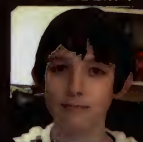
Dev talk



"There was discussion if some references would puzzle new users, but I included them because, at the end of the day, I made MGS4 for my fans."

Hideo Kojima,
Director,
Kojima Productions

Fan talk



"Ace graphics, improved combat and a smoking monkey – that's the formula for good gaming. Also seeing Snake's 'Old Man' phase was hilariously satisfying."

Rob Sewell,
Cheltenham

OPM talk



"Unapologetically steeped in its own mythology it may be, but MGS4 is the work of a visionary developer at the top of his game. Absolutely essential."

Paul Fitzpatrick,
Writer

Alternative awards

Of course, 2008 wasn't all AAA classics and air-punching thrills, as these 'winners' show...

DEVELOPER ANTI-HERO

Rob Bowling, Infinity Ward

We've long suspected there was simmering resentment at Infinity Ward over not being the only developer on the Call Of Duty series. Last November that resentment went nuclear as the Infinity Ward community manager blasted Activision's Noah Heller (producer on World At War) via his blog. Having called Heller out as a "super douche", Bowling went on to take issue with his analysis of previous games. "WTF are you talking about?! 'In previous Call Of Dutys blah blah'. First of all, you didn't work on 'previous Call Of Dutys'... Second, you're completely f***ing wrong." Still mates, yeah?

THE SIMULTANEOUSLY BEST/WORST DLC

Soulcalibur IV

It's bad enough that the ladies of Soulcalibur spend half their time wearing outfits made of string and handkerchiefs. Now, for 79p a pop, you can dress them as maids, high school students or sexy Santas. So good, so wrong.

DISASTER OF THE YEAR

Haze

Brave, bold, borked Haze. Coming from the shooter gods behind Timesplitters its 'doped up corporate merc joins crusty guerrillas' setup was meant to get us questioning the default assumption that we're always the one fighting the good fight. Fine for



■ Persia's Trophies were a pushover, Haze misfired and Sonic's sidekick made us furious.

an A-level philosophy essay, but not so much fun if all you want to do is shoot stuff for an escapist hour or two. It got worse, as well. The script aimed for Starship Troopers-style satire, but failed to appreciate that irony requires the audience to *know* your tongue is in your cheek. The biggest tragedy though, is that at the time of writing it looks like the game has taken developer Free Radical Design down with it, meaning the

end of our beloved Timesplitters series. Sad monkey smiley face.

THE BEST GAME YOU'LL NEVER PLAY

Valkyria Chronicles

You probably never played Valkyria Chronicles. Nobody did, to judge by its complete absence from the sales charts. Shame on you. Because not only is it one of the best games of recent years, it's also one of the most original,

combining turn-based strategy with intense real-time action, and wrapping it up in some of the most breathtaking cel-shaded graphics ever to grace a console. Don't be fooled by the daydream-pretty visuals though: this is a game that never shies away from the stark realities of war, and although it starts off gently, it's fiendishly challenging by the end, and consistently brilliant throughout.

WORST USE OF SIXAXIS

NFL Tour

You're playing an American Football game. You're on defence. An opposition lineman blocks your player, so how do you evade him in order to make a tackle? **X**? **Y**? **○**? Nope. Try shaking the pad *as hard as you can*. Wow, it's like being out there on the field for real! Except it totally isn't. And, unless you have superhuman reactions and can shift the pad back into its natural position instantaneously, it makes tackling once you *do* beat your man nigh-on impossible anyway. Beyond dumb.

WORST NEW CHARACTER

Chip from Sonic Unleashed

Another year, another disastrous attempted comeback from Sega's answer to Elvis. But for all the bile Sonic Unleashed triggered in our bellies, we reserved the purest rage for our spiky (ex-)friend's latest sidekick, Chip: a purple douche who loves ice cream, trots out an endless stream of banality and looks like a flying Chihuahua. Which is kind of fitting given that we'd rather let a lap dog gnaw on our own undercarriage than play the big bag of balls that was Unleashed ever again.

BEST TROPHIES FOR BABIES

Prince Of Persia

It's like an exam that gives you a point for your name. You get a trophy for *starting* the first level and another for finishing it. Try playing for five minutes *without* getting one.

MOST BORING OPENING

Far Cry 2

Clearly in thrall to Half-Life's classic go-on-a-little-ride intro, Far Cry 2 dumps you in the arse-end of Africa, where you're driven for what feels like several days through the pretty-looking savannah by a man who mumbles endlessly about political turmoil and... look, a buffalo! Whereas the scene-setting kidnap in Call Of Duty 4 is packed with astonishing sights, this just feels like an *actual* long distance drive. And the big climax at the end? You get a bit ill.

LONGEST INSTALL

Devil May Cry 4

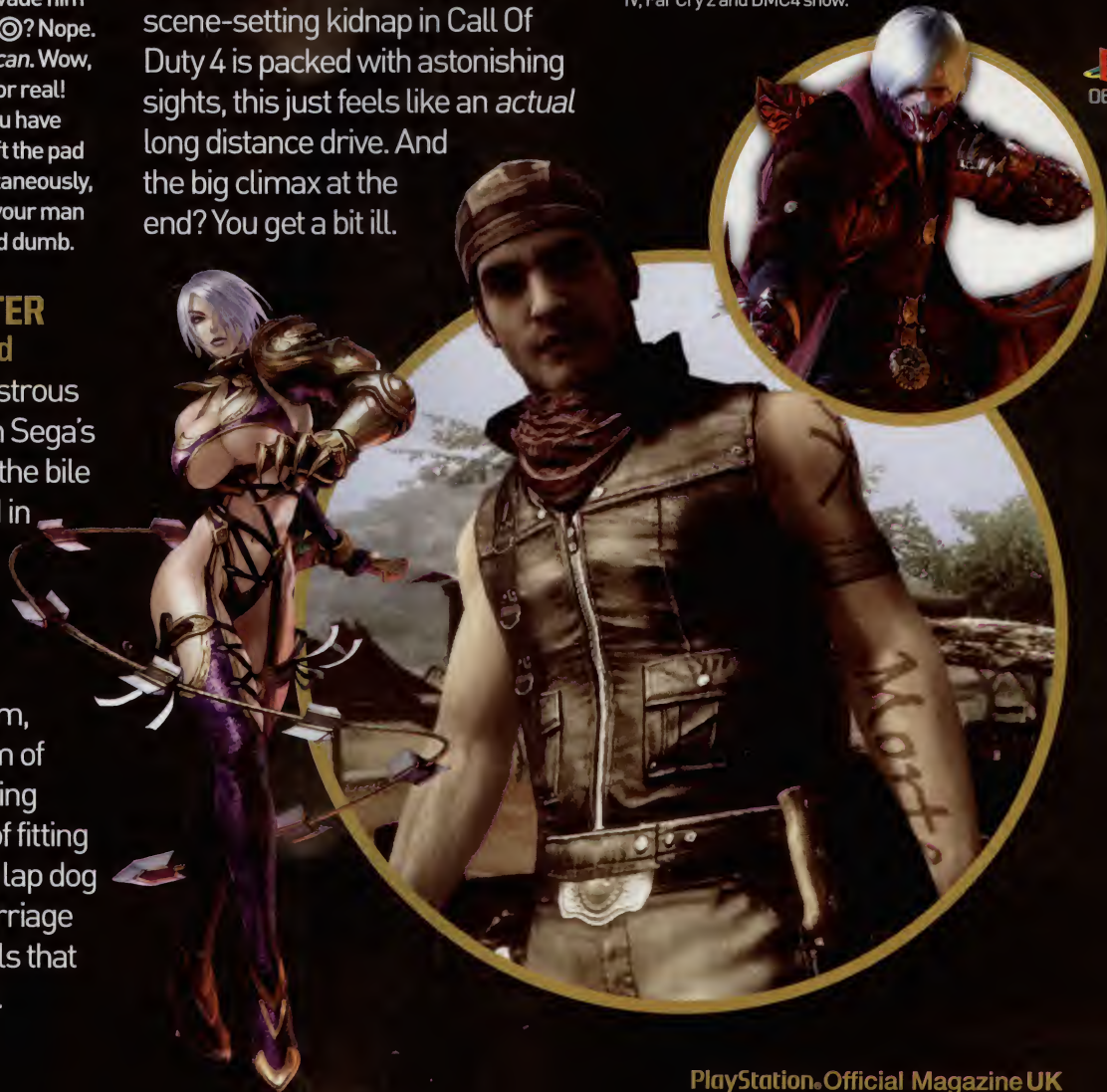
Okay, so it was early days for game data installs on PS3's hard drive but this cemented its place in the Tedium Hall Of Fame, taking well over twenty minutes to chug its way from Blu-ray to console. Which utterly negated the fraction of a second you saved loading levels when you finally got to fire up the game. Blerg.

SAD SMILEY FACE AWARD

Left 4 Dead

We're like the soot-smearing Victorian urchin left peering through the window at Valve's amazing zombie confection, with nothing but sweet denial to stop our hammering heart from breaking into a million tiny pieces. It will come to PS3 one day, *it will!*

■ Even good games drop the ball sometimes as Soulcalibur IV, Far Cry 2 and DMC4 show.



In the mood for... Swords

Which of PlayStation's flashing blades have made the cut?

However advanced and creative videogame weaponry gets (coming soon: guns that apologise after shooting you) there will always be room for the noble sword. It might lack the explosive bells and flame-throwing whistles of mechanised death-delivery, but nothing says 'the personal touch' quite like a slice of cold steel. So allow us to present the deadliest choppers in the PlayStation cutlery draw. And remember: don't run while you're holding one or you'll... Next month: the best prosthetic limbs.

The Heavenly Sword (Heavenly Sword)

Pros: Wielding this three-in-one ginormo blade gives you god-like powers, imperious combat skills and beautiful, lustrous hair. Cons: drains life force, killing you in days, adding a certain urgency to the to-do list (avenge murdered clan, kill evil overlord, look serious while camera pans around immaculate butt).



The Red Queen (Devil May Cry 4)

Newcomer Nero knew he had to make a serious impact to differentiate himself from DMC stalwart Dante. His solution?

Make sure his unfeasibly large sword stood out by attaching a throttled motor.

We're not sure how exactly the engine assists his blade – does it vibrate demons to death? – but since when has logic been more important than cool?



Blades Of Chaos (God Of War)

You could debate whether or not Kratos' Blades Of Chaos count as actual swords, given their flail-like nature, but while you're pondering the etymology of mythical Greek weapons seared to their user's arms, everyone else will be dicing up enemies like cheap braising steak. And it turns out they haven't invited you to the party afterwards either.

Soul Reaver (Legacy Of Kain)

Makes any other magical sword look like a spork. In its material form it feeds upon the souls of its victims – which leave a nasty bitter tang on the pallet – while the spectral, flaming lightsaber version can make the spirits of the dead even deadier. The blade is bonded with its vampire-wraith host, Raziel, who it turns out isn't keen on letting anyone 'have a quick go'.



Keyblade (Kingdom Hearts)

Any attempt to splice Japanese role-playing with Disney regulars was always going to take a weird approach to weaponry, and the Keyblade is about as abstract as it gets. As much 'metaphysical tool' as choppy choppy weapon, it defeats the series' evil Nobody enemies and also locks the hearts of worlds safely away from attack. Cool, in a lame way.



Gunblade (Final Fantasy VIII)

Cloud Strife was the ultimate king of phallic-bladed overcompensation when it came to fantasy swords. But then along came Squall, soundly beating out Cloud's physics-defying Buster Sword by attaching a firearm to its already ludicrously long shaft. FF heroes might be notorious for their precariously balanced hormone levels, but guys, let it go...



Soul Calibur (Soulcalibur)

Who has any idea what's going on in the Soulcalibur plot these days? Depending on which cut-scenes you remember, the sword is either the balancing half of the evil blade Soul Edge, or its glittering nemesis, created to destroy it. Siegfried's SCIV version is the definitive edition, purely because it looks like a Blackpool guesthouse chandelier.



Now have your say

Did we slice off your favourite PlayStation pig-sticker? Email opm@futurenet.com and let us know. Here are the ones that didn't make it...

■ Ivy's whip sword from Soulcalibur makes her dangerously unpredictable at any range, but it's only a sword 50% of the time.

■ Oblivion: The Shivering Isles' Dawnfang/Duskfang look good but need to be constantly fed souls. Far too needy for our liking.

■ The lightsaber is undoubtedly one of the coolest swords ever, but it's not purely a videogame weapon, is it?



THE

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YEAR

AHEAD

Cut to the chase **this** year with our
essential guide to what's **big** on PlayStation 3



feature
2009 preview

**WORLD
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■ PS3's coolest hero is back, swapping jungles for glaciers as he sets out to discover Marco Polo's lost treasure in Nepal.



ETA November Publisher Sony Developer Naughty Dog Genre Action/Adventure

Uncharted 2 Among Thieves

Naughty Dog digs up more gaming gold

A familiar sound effect pulls us instantly back into Nathan Drake's world of big-fisted adventuring. It's the jingle that accompanies him picking up a new weapon and, as before, it's an odd combination of fresh magazine being slapped home, bolt being cocked back and a big metal egg cracking. "Sweet," he says, and everyone in the room smiles. We've all gathered around our big Bravia – and this isn't the royal 'we', it really is the entire OPM team – to see a hefty chunk of gameplay from Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, the sequel to what's easily our favourite PS3 adventure.

We join Drake at the start of the game, in a war-torn Nepalese city, and up to his impossibly-handsome-but-still-absolutely-likeable neck in it. As he moves to take cover behind a car it pops like a cherry bomb, knocking our hero on his ass. He gets up, visibly shaken, and dusts himself off. Few game characters are capable of exhibiting emotion beyond empty machismo, but here you get weariness, fear and determination all in a couple of seconds of sumptuous animation. And that's why we're so excited about Uncharted 2: Among Thieves. There is no other game that mixes action and athleticism so seamlessly, which actually makes you care about its cast, and – let's not

be ashamed to say it – which you can hold up along with Killzone 2 and say *this* is what PS3 can really do.

Handsome devil

If Drake himself looks instantly familiar, the setting is anything but with a civil war raging, the streets are a mess of ruined brickwork, shattered storefronts and bullet-marked signs. This urban battleground is a world away from the jungles and temples of the original, but it still represents a playground for our hero. (Admittedly a playground full of men trying to shoot him.) Within seconds he's scampering up the side of buildings, clambering through blasted walls and swinging between those signs. The world is ridiculously detailed and, combined with that beautifully muscular animation, it's easy to see why Lara's last effort was met with a comparatively muted reception. And whereas the enemies in that game were an embarrassment to hired goons everywhere, Uncharted 2's heavily-armed ►



“Australian adventurer Chloe Frazer is Drake's partner and new love interest. She's a little more reckless and impulsive – which makes her both exciting and a bit unpredictable.”
Evan Wells, co-president, Naughty Dog



mercenaries come in various flavours, with armour and abilities altered accordingly, but all of whom use cover smartly, hunt in packs and even clamber up the scenery to winkle Drake out.

To counterbalance their smarter threat, our boy has new stealth moves at his disposal. The most useful looks to be the strangle (Drake sneaks in close, then snaps to the enemy and chokes him out in one fluid motion) but the best moment was seeing Drake hanging under a balcony, from where he reached up and hoisted a patrolling guard over the edge. Very MGS, and very cool. The hand-to-hand stuff looks crunchier too, with a real Jason Bourne flavour to it. Counter moves play a bigger part, and in one exchange we see Drake break his opponent's arm like a wet stick. Other tweaks include assigning grenades to the **L2** button for easier access, kicking scenery over to create cover and the ability to carry objects. (Which sounds a bit sexier if you think riot shields and propane tanks, as opposed to the shopping).

More subtly, there's less of an obvious separation between the shooting and climbing stuff now. So you no longer arrive in an open area to find it dotted with conveniently-shaped blocks to hide behind before the enemies pile in. Now the two gameplay types have been blended smoothly together. And of course the whole thing's peppered with little set-pieces – like a Russian Hind gunship looming into view as Drake cowers on a rooftop. His animation throughout is lavishly context-sensitive, from obvious stuff like swaying awkwardly while on a moving train to tiny details like his heart beating faster during combat.

Marco! Polo!

After the initial city-based opener the action will move to more rural surroundings – specifically the Himalayas. Drake is in Nepal on the hunt for the Cintamani Stone – a jewel believed to grant wishes that had been thought lost when Marco Polo's fleet was decimated on the return journey from China. More important to our interest in the story,



■ Nathan's new Himalayan destination should provide plenty of new climbing challenges.



though, is the presence of Chloe Frazer, an Aussie adventurer and Drake's new love interest. She's the kind of girl who invariably gets labelled as 'feisty', but given that we see her use a rocket-propelled grenade to obliterate a squad of mercs, that seems to be underselling her skills.

But before you fire a stern letter off to Naughty Dog, we can also confirm that Elena

Fisher, Drake's adorably can-do squeeze from last time, is back too. We finish up by watching a cut-scene in which Elena gets increasingly exasperated as Drake explains why he has to save the apparently treacherous Chloe. Given how good the story-telling was in the original, a love triangle should spice the sequel up nicely. And what's the betting one of the girls isn't around to see the final credits roll?



ETA March Publisher Activision Developer Radical Entertainment Genre Sandbox



Prototype

A man of many talents

Prototype sounds like the subject matter for one of those Channel 4 schlockumentaries. The *Boy Whose Body Destroyed A City* or something. This free-roaming game stars Alex Mercer as a shape-shifting, incredibly-strong, parkour-skilled mutant hoodie. It's like developer Radical couldn't decide quite what abilities to give him so they just threw the lot in. And his impressive line-up of powers is still growing. Recently added abilities include the 'stealth consume', for which Mercer sidles up behind his victim, grabs them in a full nelson, and absorbs them instantly, morphing into an exact replica. Another new skill enables Mercer to scoop up a soldier with one hand, and throw him like an anti-aircraft missile, taking down a chopper with one shot. The final trick is a new gliding power, granting limited bursts of flight to soar through the city. Just remember that with great power comes great... Oh forget it, we are *all* about throwing marines at helicopters.



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ETA TBA Publisher EA Developer EA Redwood Shores Genre Action horror



Dante's Inferno

Let's just skip past the fact that this is based on a 14th Century Italian poem about hell and concentrate on what's important: it's the next game from the *Dead Space* team, who served up the best PS3 survival horror scares this side of being chatted up in Home. The only glimpse of action so far shows an armoured warrior driving a massive crucifix through a cowering demonic minion's face. A tale of forgiveness, then.



ETA 13 March Publisher Capcom Developer Capcom Genre Survival horror

Resident Evil 5

Like a bat out of hell...

Be honest, you've never *really* been scared while playing Resident Evil, have you? Unsettled, maybe. Nervous perhaps, when you're down to your last sprig of green herb. But actual leg-shaking terror? Nuh uh. That's because Resi has always been an action game at heart. It's about deadheading zombies with a shotgun and serving giant plants acid spritzers. Which is important to mention because, if Resi was all about the scares, the fact you're never alone in the new one would be a problem.

It takes two

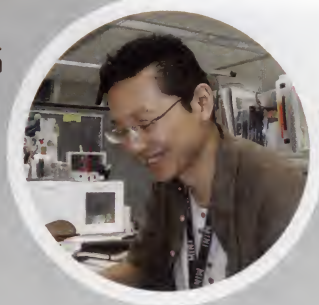
Set in Africa, the new game sees returning hero Chris Redfield (Resi 1) partnered with local talent Sheva Alomar, who's controlled either by the AI or, in co-op mode, another player. Surviving parasite-infected hordes means sharing ammo and completing puzzles together (standing on separate switches to raise winches, say, or extinguish burning gas spouts). Our co-op experiences so far suggest teamwork swiftly degenerates into the blame game. So, no scares then – but plenty of trash talk.

With the departure of series creator Shinji Mikami the development team has wisely opted against a major overhaul of the gameplay, although there is an optional new FPS-style control layout. The focus instead is on 'bigger' and 'bloodier'. Or, to put it another way: release the giant mutant croc! Enormous snapper aside, our favourite monster has to be the bat boss that appears at the end of a mine section (of *course* there's



▶ Blood-soaked sack, rotting flesh holes and a screaming chainsaw – it's the psycho ensemble of 2009.

“The team's focus has been to make Resident Evil 5 not just the best game in the series, but a standout title in its own right. So while the success of RE4 is undeniable, the only pressure on us is to make RE5 a great experience.”
Jun Takeuchi, producer, Capcom





▶ Just out of shot: Chris Redfield yelling "It's behind you!"

a mine section). It's the size of a Renault Scénic, has four wings, vomits sticky goop and gobbles bullets like M&Ms.

I need a little time

And here's something that *will* make you nervous: there's no more dipping into your suitcase to pause the action as you soothingly rearrange your guns into perfect symmetry. Inventory management is now done on the fly. Not good when a giant bat is trying to butt you over a cliff, but it makes perfect design sense – adding tension and preventing one player having to wait while the other fannies about endlessly with their equipment.

We've got the exclusive review next month, but for now here's a bit of speculation: Japanese gaming mag Famitsu recently carried an advert showing the grave of Jill Valentine, Chris' co-star from the original game. We don't believe it for a second...

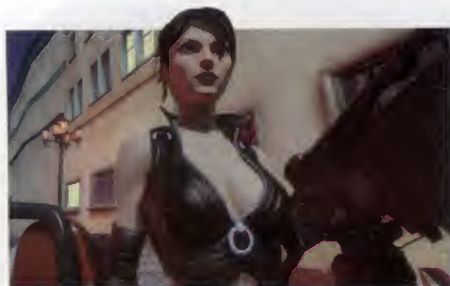
ETA March **Publisher** Warner Bros Interactive **Developer** Deadline Games **Genre** Brawler

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Watchmen: The End Is Nigh

If you're not excited about this yet then just wait until the film – another comic book adaptation from 300 director Zack Snyder – comes out in March. This PSN game is set before the film and follows two masked heroes, Night Owl (a Batman-like gadget freak) and Rorschach (a psychotic ginger vigilante) as they batter criminals in a co-op beat-'em-up-style while searching for a mythical crime lord called the Underboss.



The Agency

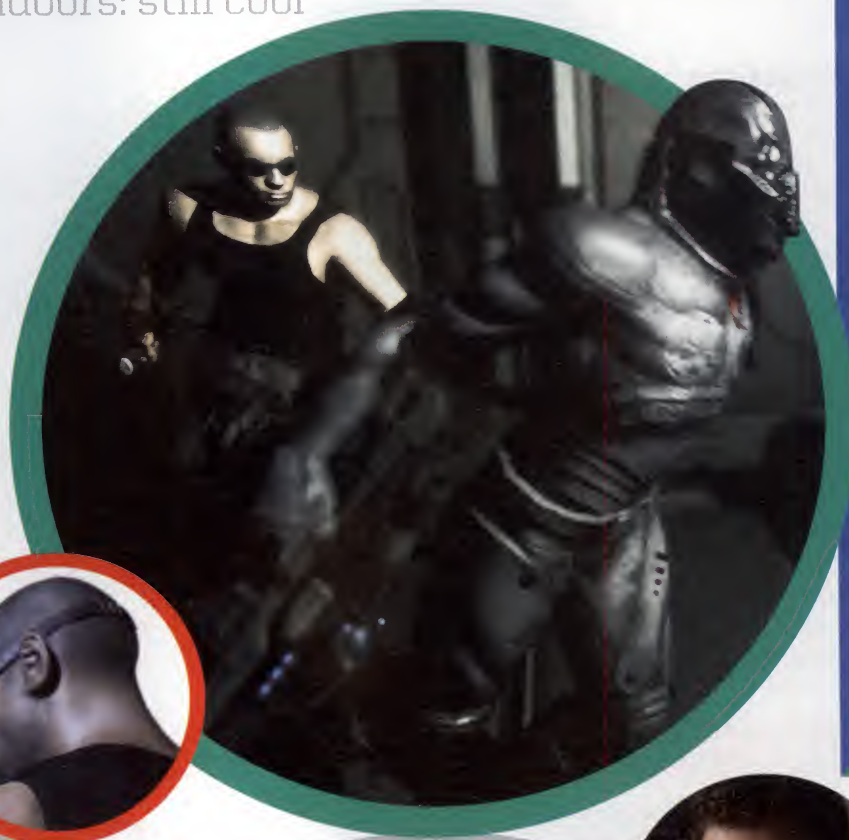
Forget the usual orc-hugging MMOs – this is an online RPG that's all about action. Login, meet pals, decide on a mission and *boom*, you're out there liquidising agents and looking cool in your customised spy-wear. Chose between the mercenary-like Paragon and the super spy outfit UNITE, conducting shooty espionage in glamorous locations. Best of all, it could be free, with adverts funding the fun. The name's Bond, Nike Bond...

ETA Spring Publisher Sony Online Entertainment Developer SOE Seattle Genre MMO

The Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena

Wearing sunglasses indoors: still cool

Riddick's first game, *Escape From Butcher Bay*, was a sophisticated blend of stealth and shooting, packed with smart design decisions. Like the meaty first-person melee combat (which required mastering fast if you were to avoid getting shivved in the titular prison's showers) and the way the camera zoomed out to third-person to show off crucial action. *Dark Athena* was originally planned as an HD remake of *Butcher Bay*, but with Atari having taken over publishing duties the team at Starbreeze has had more time to add new content. (A full sequel is also still planned.) Our hands-on, guiding the lead man through the bowels of the spaceship which lends the game its name, demonstrated some genuinely tense stealth, strong cut-scene acting (by videogame standards Diesel is our Olivier) and some startling violence. Like gutting an enemy with a rapid slice of a curved blade or sneaking up behind another and stabbing him *through* the head. The best bit, however, is taking over remotely controlled drone soldiers – created from kidnapped travellers – and using them to attack their mindless teammates.

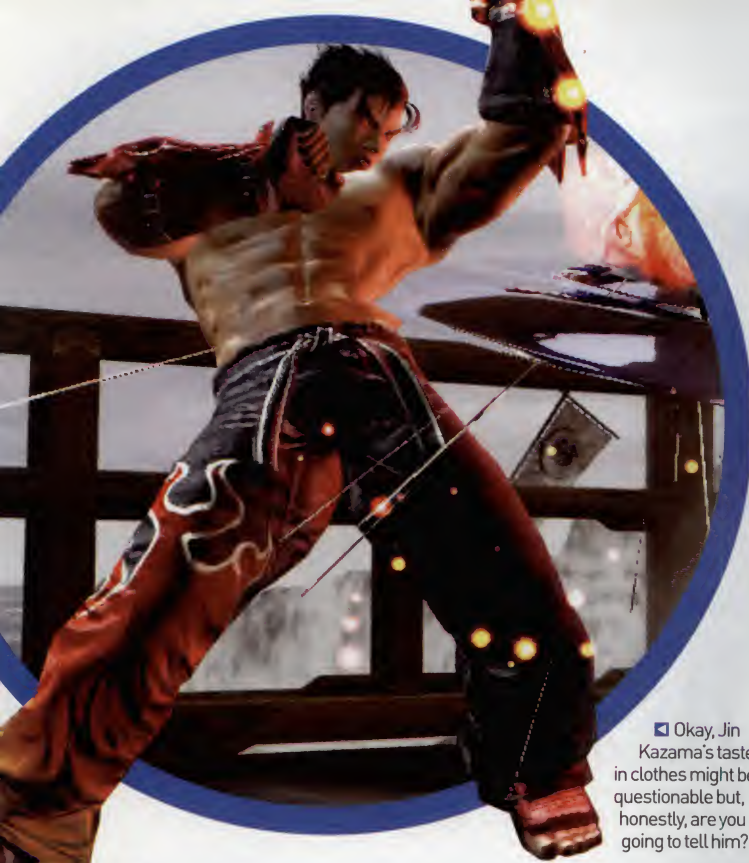


We announced it as a remake with added content but the scope of the game has changed a lot since then. What we have now is a pretty extensive remake and an entirely new chapter."

Ian Stephens, head of production, Tigon Studios



ETA March Publisher Atari Developer Starbreeze Studios/Tigon Studios Genre Stealth



❑ Okay, Jin Kazama's taste in clothes might be questionable but, honestly, are you going to tell him?

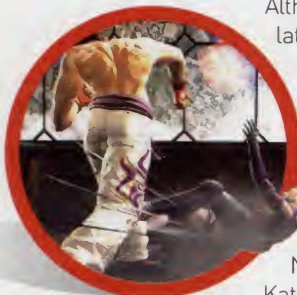
Tekken 6

It's a dysfunctional family affair

Although historically resistant to change, the latest Tekken does feature some significant tweaks. There's a new 'Bound' combo system that lets you smash opponents into the ground so hard that they bounce back up so you can hit them again and extend your combos. You can also now batter people clean through walls and floors to open up new areas to fight in.

Not revolutionary changes, but project lead Katsuhiro Harada explains: "We try to keep the core mechanics that make a fun fighting game while adding new features that change the strategy and the way matches play out."

Harada also tells us this will be the definitive version of the brawler. "The Japanese arcade cabinets are connected to the Tekken-net enabling the game balance to be updated. As soon as these fixes are finalised they will make it into the console version." So expect T6 to be race-tuned when it hits PS3 later this year.



ETA TBC Publisher Square Enix Developer Square Enix Genre RPG



Final Fantasy XIII

Man, how cool would it be to date a girl called Lightning? In the latest footage the heroine uses her gravity powers to glue her feet to the walls and ceiling as she runs rings around fascist sci-fi guards. The FF series often doesn't get the credit it deserves for constantly reinventing its systems and settings – brilliantly, on PS3 it's ditched fairytale villages and monsters for a techno makeover complete with demonic robots. We like.

ETA Summer Publisher Sega Developer Gearbox Genre Sci-fi shooter

Aliens Colonial Marines

They play it at night. Mostly

Four-player online co-op means this could serve as our Left 4 Dead substitute. As well as a Pulse Rifle, each marine has a different skill – like explosives or (sigh) hacking – which you'll need to make the most of to survive. The Marines' gruff attitude has been ripped of mercilessly, so it's good to see them star in a game. Hopefully rumours of troubled development are just that. The alien queen will appear as a boss, meaning you'll need a girl on the team just so she can utter the line: "Get away from her you..."



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ETA Spring Publisher Sony Developer Sucker Punch Genre Action



Infamous

Our friend's electric

Electrically-charged hero Cole won't be fighting the equally empowered gangs of Empire City alone. Lending him a hand is best friend Zeke, who'll have your back in a fight, love interest Trish, who acts as your medic, and a mysterious source of intel named Moya. But though you have a willing team and incredible powers at your disposal, you don't have to be a hero, as game director Nate Fox explains: "Anyone trying to kill Cole or his buddies is the enemy. It's simple really, Cole's on a quest that allows him the flexibility to be either selfless or selfish, good or evil... and anyone that tries to keep him from his goal is gonna get a lightning bolt to the face."

Fun, fun, fun

The superpowers revealed so far are Cole's electrical blasts, his climbing skills and being able to read the minds of dead bodies to find out what happened to them. Whatever other abilities he gets Fox says they'll all have one crucial link – fun. "Cole can shoot lighting bolts out of his hands, why? Because shooting in videogames works freaking well. Same with being able to climb everywhere in the world and jump between buildings – it's fun to do! This is our core strategy in crafting our superhero – we're building the world around his powers and his powers around what's fun to do in the world."



We're trying to give players the feeling of becoming a modern-day superhero. To provide a challenge we've crafted a rogue's gallery of equally gifted enemies. After all, powerful iconic villains are a must for any superhero experience."

Nate Fox, game director, Sucker Punch





ETA March Publisher Ubisoft Developer Ubisoft Genre Flight sim



HAWX

Crash and burn in style

Relax. It's nothing like a serious flight sim. Rather, it's a sort of tactical FPS in fighter jets. It's 2014 and you're a hotshot pilot working for a private military company who's sent to blast through a series of missions. The action takes place in hotspots all over the world from Afghanistan to... Rio (!), either on your own or in four-player drop-in/drop-out co-op.



Requesting flyby

The action neatly slots into the Tom Clancy universe, with elements of Ghost Recon and Endwar feeding into the story. The real hook is the Enhanced Reality System that provides you with interception trajectories, missile detection and anti-crash assistance. There's also an 'Off' mode which switches to an external camera for a beautiful cinematic view of the action. Thomas Simon, lead game designer explains: "We'd been trying to change the dogfight perspective and we tried to switch to replay camera in missile alert, just to see. The result was, a) surprisingly cool, but b) unplayable. We worked for months to make it playable."



ETA Winter Publisher 2K Games Developer 2K Marin Genre First-person shooter

Bioshock 2: Sea Of Dreams

Little is known about one of the year's biggest sequels although the cryptic teaser shows a young woman looking out to sea clutching a toy Big Daddy. The rumour is it'll be both a prequel – perhaps based around the building of Rapture – and a sequel. 2K Marin, who handled the excellent PS3 conversion and Challenge Room DLC, is taking over from the original devs 2K Boston while design overlord Ken Levine is in charge of the project.

Bayonetta

Sexy witch? Check. And we're done...



Unlike Director Hideki Kamiya's previous game, *Devil May Cry*, which peppers its action with puzzles and slow bits, *Bayonetta* is a bombardment of action and hyperactive set-pieces. One minute you're scrapping on a giant slab of rock as it hurtles thousands of feet down the side of a cliff. The next you're morphing her hair into butterfly wings and flapping across a crumbling bridge. Of course you are.

Bad hair day

Bayonetta's primary weapon is her barnet, which forms a variety of shapes like hammers, fists and angry Rottweilers. She also packs heat in the shape of four pistols, two of which are built into the *heels of her boots*, letting her cartwheel around the level, dispensing hot lead from every limb. Her enemies are angels, who come in the form of ancient white marble statues possessed by parasitic beings. The mixture of flailing tentacles and elegant Roman-style cherubs is entirely intentional; the developers wanted to twist the traditional ideas of good and evil. *Bayonetta* is a witch, see, but that doesn't mean she's all bad.

With no shortage of cookie cutter sci-fi shooters around, *Bayonetta* provides a satisfyingly bonkers alternative. Sure, it'll probably sell about ten copies, but we'll love it, you'll love it, and that's all that matters, right?

Her guns are called Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme.



The whole theme of her attacks is 'sexiness'. I'm with the team thinking, 'What should we do with *Bayonetta* to make her look sexy?'

Hideki Kamiya, director, Platinum Games



Flower

Green-fingered gaming

❑ The music and visuals are interactive and create a hypnotic experience.

Given that it's a) called Flower and b) you play a cloud of petals, it's no surprise the creators are worried about the reaction. "If someone isn't 'getting it', we've failed as designers," admits Kellee Santiago, co-founder of thatgamecompany. Unlike its previous PSN title, the 2D Flow, here you're swooshing over rolling fields in 3D, bringing Technicolor love and triggering ambient jingles by collecting flowers.

"We think of Flower as a videogame version of a poem," explains Santiago, not really helping herself. "At times dreamy, at other times hyper-real." The reality comes from the fact that PS3 can render 200,000 blades of grass in every frame, while the dreaminess is because this feels like a unique and potentially even moving experience. Santiago says: "It invites the player to interpret the meaning – what they take out of it depends on what they themselves bring to it as individuals."



▶ This will be PS3's most realistic military sim to date.

Operation Flashpoint Dragon Rising

War just got (even more) serious

It's hard to know what's more scary – the one-hit kills or the fetishistic attention to detail. "It's as close to real war as it's possible to get in a game," says Clive Lindop, senior designer, boldly. The team researched everything from Chinese helicopter dashboards to war wounds to make the experience as authentic as possible. The one thing that is fictional, though, is the war. It's China versus America and you play a US rookie patrolling the fictional island of Skira. The place is packed with natural resources and subject to a dubious ownership claim, so when Chinese forces invade you're thrown into the heart of a global conflict. It means getting experienced with explosives, a massive range of vehicles and some serious guns. And while Flashpoint is aiming for realism, that doesn't mean the game will be dry. "I think players are going to be awed by the artillery and air strikes they can call in: they're full scale and devastating!" says Lindop.

❑ "Hey, no fair! I called the seat with the minigun!"



ETA Winter Publisher Sony Developer Polyphony Digital Genre Driving sim

Gran Turismo 5

GT's astonishing technical prowess has defined PlayStation for over a decade. With Prologue having served as a test bed, work is nearly done on the most accomplished driving sim ever. Fresh facts are thin, so try hard numbers instead: four years, 150 staff, and a budget 50 times higher than the PS1 original. And if Sony's James Armstrong is to be believed, it'll be out before Santa next presses the 'launch control' button on his sleigh.



■ A supercharged version of the Ego engine used in Dirt and Race Driver Grid will bring the off-road racing to life.

Dirt 2

The legend returns to PS3

Though tinged with obvious sadness, the return of Colin McRae Dirt is cause for celebration, providing permanent testament to its star's passion for motorsports. This sequel will offer more off-road competition, class-leading visuals, brilliantly competitive AI while also adding in events inspired by the races McRae competed in towards the end of his career: the X Games, the Race Of Champions and the Dakar Rally.

True grit

While many of the events are fictional, they take place in meticulously researched real-life locations. Battersea Battle, for example, is a night time race through deserted alleyways and abandoned warehouses with the hulking power station looming in the background. The dev team also promises improved multiplayer – almost every event can be played online.

Senior executive producer Gavin Raeburn is at pains to point out that the driving experience will be noticeably amped up in Dirt 2. "The challenging part is finding new things to be inspired by and new directions. What distinguishes us from many off-road racers is that our vehicles are real – licensed, researched and painstakingly built from reference." So expect ever more accurate damage and subtle, unique handling for every car while new crowd rendering tech means crowds of spectators will whoop and holler your every slide, jump and smash.



■ The target images for Dirt 2 set the visual bar predictably high.

“We’ve taken all the best of rally and off-road racing and created events unmatched in spectacle. It’s our tribute to the late, great Colin McRae.” **Gavin Raeburn, senior executive producer, Codemasters**



Batman Arkham Asylum

The caped crusader kicks ass in crazy town

With DC writer Paul Dini co-writing the script, Mark Hamill voicing the Joker and a supervillain roster including Harley Quinn, Mr Zsasz, Killer Croc, Bane and Riddler (among others), developer Rocksteady is determined to produce the definitive Batman game. "We've taken inspiration from his 70-year history to make a game that has the entire Batman DNA flowing through it," says game director Sefton Hill.

The eponymous Gothic madhouse is the game's only location, contrasting cavernous state rooms with dank dungeons and rust-splattered laboratories. You're free to explore wherever you wish, but there's an overarching narrative in which Bats must contain a major breakout, guided by Joker.

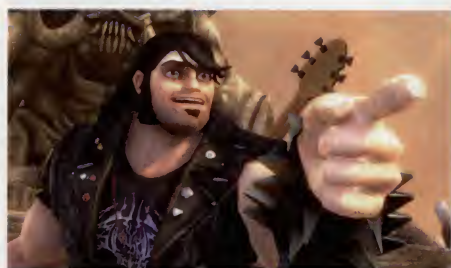
Welcome to hell

A simple melee combat system enables you to batter bad guys with a single button while Batman can also use gadgets and forensic science to hunt for clues. The design team is keen to highlight Batman's predatory tactics – he can lurk in the shadows, swinging around the ceiling, taking out enemies one by one, and using victims' screams to flush out others. It's also possible to upgrade Batman, adding new abilities as you progress to create your own version of the hero. Madness, mystery, violence and fear... the recipe sounds right. Batman is going to hell, and we're all along for the ride.

■ The classic 'What did I do?' pose. Often assumed shortly before the equally popular knee to the face.

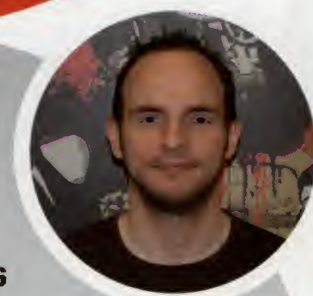
“There is an RPG system that allows Batman to choose new abilities as he progresses. The player is free to choose, and this allows you to alter and develop your strategies.”
Sefton Hill, game director, Rocksteady Studios

ETA Autumn Publisher EA Developer Double Fine Genre Adventure



Brutal Legend

Games don't usually do 'funny'. Unless you're Tim Schafer whose previous effort, Psychonauts on PS2, was hilarious. So how do you top that? Get Jack Black to voice your new hero, Eddie. This rock roadie dropout is accidentally transported to a world where metal is real – satanic worship, demons, *really* slutty chicks. He must then fight evil and save the girl. To help he has a range of rock powers, like *actual* face-melting guitar solos.



ETA Summer Publisher Eidos Developer Rocksteady Studios Genre Action

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▲ Nathan has been forced to watch videos of the Argie defence since his big blunder.



Tight draw for OPM

Season stabilised with steady performance



After last month's embarrassing 4-0 reversal, a brave performance was needed this month to steady the OPM ship. And, thanks to some solid mid-season signings, that's exactly what we got. Our most recent match saw our Arsenal team race into an early lead against Manchester City thanks to a debut goal from new boy Lukes007cool001, who ran through the City defence to slot the ball coolly in the corner.

Despite massive pressure – we conceded 74% of territory in the first half

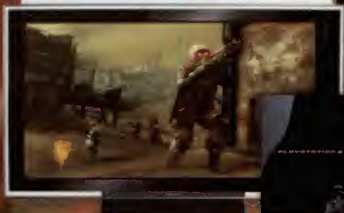
– we kept the City threat at bay until after the break. But on 55 minutes, what should have been a routine clearance by our own OPM Nath (playing out of position as Sagna at right-back, he keeps telling everyone) turned into a suicidal pass across goal, which was intercepted and converted. Nath later made amends with a clearance off the line, but there was no more scoring. Final score: 1-1.

If you'd like to join our side, or register your existing club to play against us, go to gamesradar.com/fifa09onlinechallenge.



Sign up to play our FIFA 09 side now
gamesradar.com/fifa09onlinechallenge

**The
OPM review
setup**



Our review code is tested on hi-def and standard-def TVs to ensure we know how games perform at both ends of the scale. Our HD setup is a 70" Sony Bravia with Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound.

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - UK

Reviews

Your essential guide to every new release

Getting drawn into cross-console squabbling is a bit like a hot wing eating contest or thongs-only mud wrestling: irresistible at the time, but you're left feeling overwhelmed by shame. Well, this month you find us stripped to our collective jockstrap, because when a game like *Killzone 2* lands it's impossible not to get fighty. Remember all the pre-Christmas *Gears Of War 2* evangelising? Well LOOK AT IT, GEARS OF WAR! Look at its pretty face.

And so, contrary to the doubts and fears we all held, *Killzone 2* isn't just 'okaaaay'. It doesn't even stop at being good. It's an absolute belter and – with no hint of hyperbole – the best looking game on PS3. Seeing it run makes you wonder what the hell everyone else isn't doing. We'll never complain about release date delays again (probably).

Elsewhere, we have EA's Hawk's-ruining sequel *Skate 2*, Tolkien-shaped *Battlefield* action with *LOTR: Conquest*, and tribal cartoon oddness with *Patapon 2* on PSP. Keep it Official.



88

KILLZONE 2

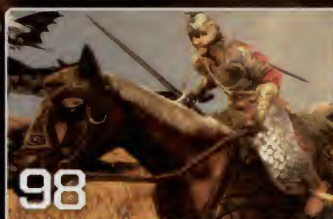
Absurdly handsome to look at, and just as impressive to play. Is this the shooter of 2009 already?



94

SKATE 2

More freedom, flexibility and kick-flips with (still) the best 'boarder on PS3. For God's sake don't let Tony see you with it.



98

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: CONQUEST

Generally, movie tie-ins need to be either released at the same time as the film or really, really good. Um.

How we score our reviews...

10 Essential

Instant classic that's as close as it gets to PlayStation perfection.

9 Outstanding

Highly recommended, and an investment you won't regret.

8 Very good

Mostly excellent, but held back by one or two minor flaws.

7 Good

Enjoyable, but with definite room for improvement. Rent it first.

6 Reasonable

A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Average

A game that is both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Below average

Too flawed to be anything more than a brief curiosity.

3 Poor

A seriously flawed game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful

A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it as you would a bullet.

1 Horrific

Buy this shocker and watch your console self-combust in protest.

**GOLD
AWARD**
PlayStation
Official Magazine

Our highest accolade

The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics and profound appeal.



088 **Space invaders**

Killzone 2

Sony's flagship shooter pwns all



Don't worry. There's no shame in being a graphics whore here. So let's just say it: Killzone 2 is, without question, the most impressive looking game ever. The perving starts with the super-flashy intro movie. In it, the game's soon-to-be-heroes Sev and Rico gaze up at a vast armada of ships preparing to launch. Next, the camera hurtles through space to their destination, Helghan, in one unbroken shot, quick-cutting to the slaughter on the ground, then swirling and zooming around the ISA soldiers as they're cut down and butchered by unseen enemies. There are plumes of blood and horrified 'not me, not like this' faces. Then, finally, the Helghast step out of the smoke, part Darth Vader, part Terminator, all evil. As a mission statement goes, it says that Killzone 2 will be a) momentous b) beautiful and c) utterly savage.

It hits the mark on all three counts. This is a blockbusting sci-fi shooter that



looks like nothing else. A typical quote from the gawping bystanders as we played in the office: "WTF has everyone else been doing on PS3 if Guerrilla can make a game look like this?" After all the controversy of the initial 'target footage' CG trailer, the developer has, if anything, over-delivered on the visuals. You could shoot a film using this game engine – it's that good. Beautifully animated, weighty models, richly detailed environments and lighting that would make Turner weep.

Eye candy

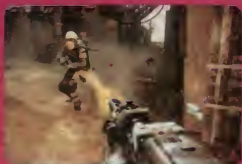
Impressive though they are, screenshots cannot hope to convey how astounding Killzone 2 looks in motion. You can't see the incredible effect of a lightning flash throwing shadows from fluttering, storm-whipped tarpaulins and cables. The detail is minute, with grit-laden winds that scour the ground, and bloom and blur effects that sex up explosions or cast strobing muzzle flash silhouettes

onto walls. There's so much texture and depth to everything that overnight it makes every other FPS look like a cartoon. Visually, this is the point of no return for PS3 graphics.

The planet Helghan is the most beautiful sh*t-hole you'll ever visit. A scorched industrial wasteland built from concrete and corrosion, broken up by splashes of sodium lighting. Imagine a poorly lit, abandoned car park used to store rusty car wrecks and rubble and you're pretty much there. Yay, right? The colour saturation has been boosted to bring life to the limited palette and you do branch out from the cityscapes to visit arid Mars-like deserts, but don't expect to taste the rainbow during your tour of duty. The place is such a dump it makes you wonder why the Helghast are bothering to defend it at all. Surely leaving them to rot on their toxic little planet would be a far worse punishment than crossing the galaxy to shoot them? ►



Five showstopping moments



DESERT STORM

While investigating the Helghan power grid the team ends up in a barren, abandoned shanty town. An ambush soon livens up the dusty walk, though.



TICKET TO RIDE

Part of Alpha squad has been kidnapped so Rico and Sev set out to rescue them. To do that they fight their way towards the front of a moving train and hijack it.



BRIGHT SPARK

The VC5 Electricity Gun is the best gun in the game. It fires huge arcs of voltage that fry anything they touch. Oh, and it *never* runs out of ammo either.



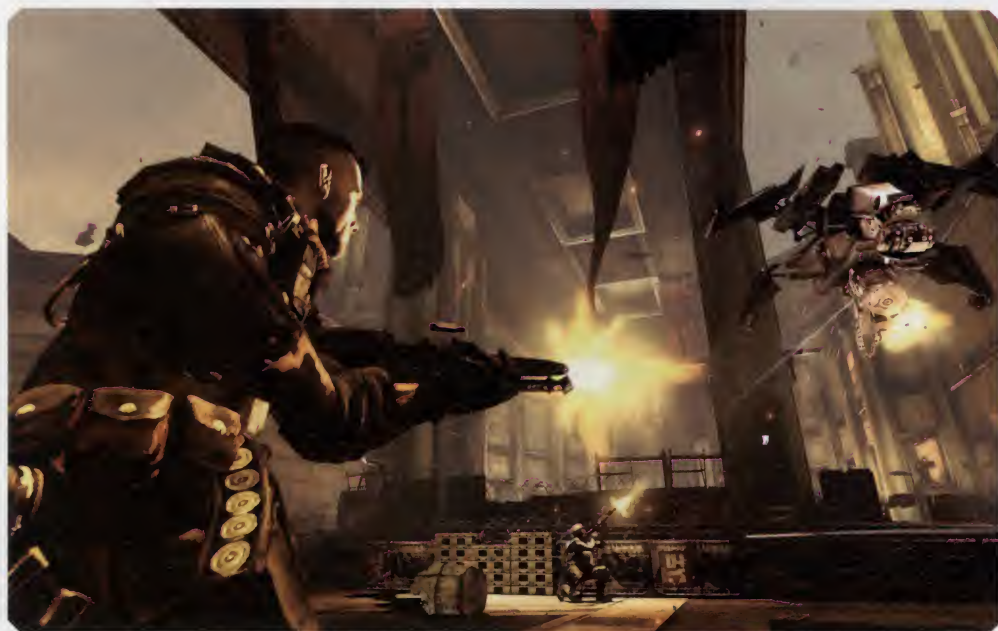
AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

When the Helghast attack the ISA fleet there's a chance to re-enact the shootout from Star Wars as you jump into an AA gun and let rip. It looks *amazing*.



SUIT UP

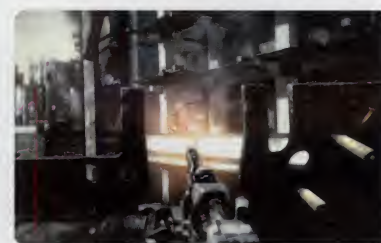
In the final few levels you get a massive stompy suit of power armour, equipped with a cannon and rockets. Feels ace and makes short work of Helghast scum.



▲ These flying sentry drones are called ATACs.



▲ Gun show: you'll be spending a long time admiring those beautifully rendered barrels.



▲ The abundant machine gun emplacements are used heavily in the set-piece battles.

"The usual shooter bloodlust is sharpened by a dash of panic."

But since you *have* travelled all that way, you're sure as hell taking the safety off. Once you've overcome the urge to simply stare open mouthed at everything (a feeling that never completely disappears) you'll discover that there's a stern and challenging shooter with some of the most involving combat we've played in ages. After all the rumours of Infinity Ward working on a sci-fi Call Of Duty it turns out they needn't bother – this has beaten them to it. Battles can be harsh, but they're always rewarding. It's intense and, at times, overwhelming. Peek over a wall during the rattle and roar of an engagement to see a constellation of baleful orange eyes staring you down and there's a strong urge to run away – the usual FPS bloodlust sharpened by a dash of uncertainty and panic in the face of insurmountable odds.

As you'd hope, the weapons are excellent. They're mostly sci-fied up versions of real guns: assault rifles, shotguns and heavy machine guns – only louder, thanks to the futuristic makeover. So even the handguns are wide-bore barrels of thunderous, angry death. There are also a few fantasy pieces like an explosive bolt gun that pins enemies to walls and a lightning gun you'll *never* want to put down. The two-weapon system feels stingier than the similar ones in Halo and Resistance, though – rather than being able to carry two of anything it restricts you to one gun and a pistol, which is especially mean when you're forced to grab a rocket launcher to deal with tanks, as it's imprecise against troops. The only total misfire is the sniper rifle. There's nothing



wrong with it, I just never found a situation where it excelled – battles are so ferocious and gigantic that using such a precise weapon feels like trying to fend off an elephant stampede with an acupuncture needle.

A long way from home

The action starts off gently. Sort of. The story picks up after the events of the first game where the Helghast attacked the peaceful colony planet of Vekta. Having repelled the assault, the Vektan ISA forces have now launched a massive retaliatory invasion. After your dropship crash lands you're thrown straight into the frontline. It's a massacre: troops are dropping all around you, flaming ships career overhead and anything that isn't exploding is being shot and anything that isn't being shot is balled in the corner crying for its mother. It might seem like carnage but enjoy these early moments. They're like a yoga retreat compared to what comes later. The first few levels aren't hugely



challenging. The battlefields are open and the Helghast have clearly been told to go easy on you. It's a good chance to get used to Sev's movement – it's weightier, more deliberate and more realistic than in most FPS games. When you jump or run there's the believable heft of a large man loaded with kit rather than a gun mounted on a trolley. You'll also want to dip straight into the options and choose the Alternative 2 controls to switch precision aim from R3 (which is useless) to a far more instinctive **L1**.

While these initial battles are fantastic to behold, they're worryingly rigid, filled with a bitty 'to do' list – take out the gun emplacement, open the door, man the tank, flick the switch and so on. If that continued it would soon irritate like a pair of horsehair Speedos. But somewhere around the third level things kick up a notch, as you fight to clear a path for an ISA convoy you reach a bridge. It should be easy – it's a straight road, pockmarked with barriers and roadblocks – but it's here that you start to realise how capable and diligent a foe the Helghast really are. They're just as good at using cover, assessing threats and causing trouble as you are. Respect is due: they're *nails*.

Until now the clever cover mechanic hasn't been much more than a nifty gimmick. Suddenly it's essential. Using **L2** enables you to duck behind objects ►

❑ The Helghast won't be an easy target all the time – they're stern opponents.



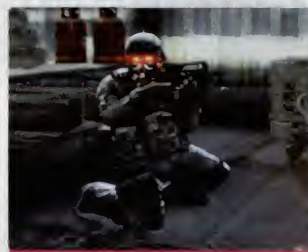
❑ The regular appearance of comrades and other squads mean you never feel alone.



❑ All that galaxy-hopping technology and no one thought to bring a fire extinguisher?

Know your enemy

There are several classes of Helghast – here are three of the deadliest



ASSAULT TROOPER

Your basic Helghast grunt. Reasonably well armoured and packing the standard assault rifle he prefers to anchor into cover and use grenades to flush out opponents, then pick them off. Do not underestimate.

Armour	Small arms protection
Helmet	Standard issue
Primary gun	StA-52 assault rifle
Secondary	Grenades
Ammo	Standard issue
Tactics	Trench warfare



HEAVY SOLDIER

Basically a human tank. The Heavy's armour and high firepower mean a single soldier can take out an entire squad. His only weakness is the chaingun's coolant tanks on his back.

Armour	Full-body synthetic fibre
Helmet	LSha5 helmet
Primary gun	StA-6 chaingun
Secondary	Grenades
Ammo	Depleted uranium rounds
Tactics	Brute force



SHOCK TROOPER

Fast and suicidal, these troops launch frontal attacks and somersault to avoid gunfire. Armed with a submachine gun they prefer to get in close and make all slicey with their combat knives instead.

Armour	None
Helmet	Minimal faceplate
Primary gun	StA11 SMG
Secondary	Combat knife
Ammo	Standard issue
Tactics	Rush attacks

❑ The mighty electric gun is the best weapon in the game.



"If you haven't been shot to bits, your nerves sure as hell will be."

and stick to them. You still see what's going on but you're effectively 'safe' from gunfire (providing no one gets behind you or throws a grenade). Pushing up, left or right on the left stick then pops you out to take a shot. With the huge number of Helghast, picking off a few targets, hiding, spotting a gap and making a break to a new position is the *only* way to survive. The Helghast constantly pile on the pressure, flanking, repositioning and advancing. By the time you take the bridge, if you haven't been utterly shot to bits, your nerves sure as hell will have been.

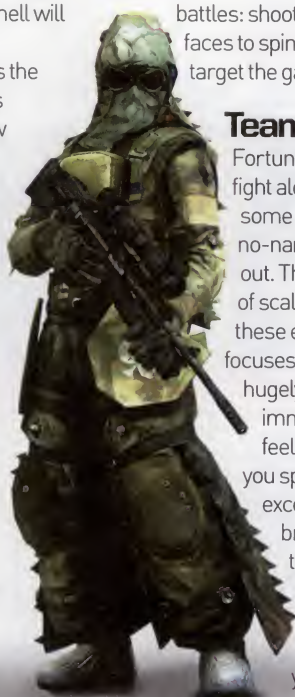
From the bridge onwards the pace of the combat remains relentless. There's still a few things on your 'to do' list – explosives to place, switches to turn – but the focus stays on the fighting, mixing large-scale engagements with urban shootouts and low key infiltrations. One small battle sees you besieged by the Helghast, holed up with an ISA squad in a small house. It's a desperately vicious and claustrophobic gang fight – both sides a few feet apart, blind firing from cramped cover as the air sings with bullets. Another level sees you sprinting forwards, piercing

the enemy's perimeter like a dagger and covering more ground in one level than you have in the rest of the game so far. Different Helghast soldiers and their unique tactics also add variety: grunts fire from cover, shock troopers rush forwards using commando rolls to avoid gunfire while riflemen hang back, using range to their advantage. And that's only a taster – there's plenty more. The largest threat are the Heavies, huge lumbering Helghast with chainguns that have to be taken down in mini boss battles: shoot them in their armoured faces to spin them around and then target the gas tanks on their backs.

Team player

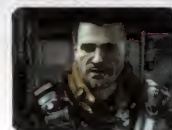
Fortunately you rarely have to fight alone. There is nearly always some of your unit or some no-name body bag fodder to help out. They add a welcome sense of scale to the conflict. During these encounters the battle never focuses solely on you, adding hugely to the sense of immersion because it doesn't feel like the enemy are paying you special attention. Instead the excellent AI means that all hell breaks loose between the two sides and you're in the middle – a small cog in a blood-slick war machine.

That said, given that you're part of a team, it's a



Castlist

The hero



Sev
You play as the newbie, sent on just about every suicidal mission going.

The vet



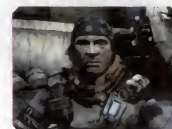
Rico
Back from Killzone 1 and Liberation, Rico has fought since the war began.

The friend



Garza
Sev's buddy Garza is the quiet type but has a caustic relationship with Natko.

The mouth



Natko
Privileged smart-ass put through military academy by his parents. Er, thanks?



2up
second opinion

Name Tim Clark
Angle Shooter obsessive

"That it's ridiculously good-looking is a given (strikes Magnum pose) but I didn't expect Killzone 2 to play this... well... *meatily*. With the Helghast pouring forward, lightning and explosions flashing the city, it feels like waking up inside the most violent episode of Doctor Who ever. My only reservation is that some of the later enemies are a bit chewy to finish off, but in terms of excitement its only real rival is COD4. Huge praise indeed."

Best for...
Impressing 360-owning friends



▲ The Helghast go down easy to start with but get more resilient as the game progresses.



▲ The cover system provides a brief breather from bullets so you can form a plan of attack.

shame there isn't a greater focus on characterisation. You have to revive key characters if they go down using a defib gun thing, so it would be nice if you cared more. The opening two acts, however, are so loud and chaotic that the men around you can't really do much more than shout and point. Later, events transpire to make them more human but, by then, it's too little too late – they'll always be the one in the hat, the one in the bandana, the angry one from the last game etc. Your own character, Sev, also suffers. It's confusing as to whether he's meant to be a mute avatar or the strong silent type. There's no commitment either way – he says nothing for ages, talks a bit then shuts up again and pops up in cut-scenes leaving you unsure whether he's him or you're you.

Not being able to remember names isn't a biggy, though, and generally you'll be too busy, dug into cover trying not to die, to care. Once the action takes off it



rarely pauses and the game only really drops the ball in the final level with a nasty slice of busy work. After all the incredible, monumental battles, the finale consists of being shut in a room while endless waves of enemies whittle away at your patience. It's a major anticlimax. Up until then everything's been spectacularly massive, and a colossal COD-style crescendo would have been far more appropriate.

Be the best

While it's not the best finish, the multiplayer pulls off a last minute save with 32-player online games that keep all of the solo game's incredible graphical oomph. Match types are the usual spread of deathmatches, CTFs and assassination missions but there's a clever setup where several match types are thrown into one game with objectives changing on the fly. There's also plenty of customisation enabling you to mix any two classes' abilities. So you could take a sniper's cloaking power and mix it with the

❑ The attack drones can be a real pain if you don't take them down fast.

❑ The excellent multiplayer uses a variety of classes, like this engineer.



❑ Flank an enemy or create a crossfire with your squad and they go down *much* more easily.



❑ The bloody damage indicator looks nice but doesn't always make it clear who's shooting you.

medic's healing skills, for example. Or combine the capability to deploy a mobile spawn point with the ability to build a sentry turret to create a safe place from which teammates can launch attacks. There are also some exciting-looking community plans on the way, with clan tournaments that let you bet leaderboard points on match outcomes. We'll have more on that soon.

Overall it's an outstanding achievement. Visually it's so far ahead of anything else out there it shatters your expectations. If this is what developers can do when they don't have to think about Xbox as well

then let's never go back to dual platform development again. And then there's the gameplay: cruel and uncompromising but also forceful and empowering. You don't finish levels, you survive them. Some things feel a bit off. There's apparently only one man in the whole of the ISA who's trained to hack door locks, there are occasional, brief screen-freezing loading pauses and you can probably knock a good 45 minutes off the eight-hour running time if you ignore the horrible difficulty spike right at

the end. But nothing dampens the impact of the overall experience. This is PS3 showing what it's truly capable of and delivering a landmark piece of explosive entertainment you can't afford to miss.

Leon Hurley



❑ Your skater: totally customisable.
Wearing awful hats: totally optional.



Flip out

Skate 2

Now with added walking. Yay?

Skate was a big success, partly because it provided a fresh alternative to Tony Hawk's increasingly gimmicky monopoly, but also because it created a control system so deep that it had to be properly *learned*. With most games you either understand the controls after a few minutes – that satisfying realisation of how to shoot or fire or punch, *click* – or throw down the pad and mutter petulantly about it all being broken. But Skate's flick-it system, which used movement of the right analogue stick to intuitively mimic board control, was so dexterous and well-designed that getting better at it felt like learning a new real-world physical skill. You could still grab the pad and make your skater hop about by waggling the stick indiscriminately – and that was still fun – but if you wanted to sit down and really master the controls, the system was robust enough to do that too.

The best thing about Skate 2 is that it takes the flick-it controls and builds on them without changing any of the

Like this?
Play these



Mirror's Edge
Stark but super-stylish first-person platformer, which has controls that operate on a similar learning curve.

VERDICT 9



Tony Hawk's Project 8
Over-the-top but ultimately inferior arcade skater.

VERDICT 7

fundamentals. Rather than bolting extra moves and gimmicks onto the existing framework, the framework itself has been expanded, and now includes foot controls and a hand-plant option. Initially, this might sound underwhelming like receiving a single sock for your birthday, but it's actually a substantial change. In the same way that your left and right hands were mapped to **L2** and **R2** in the original game, now your left and right feet are controlled by **○** and **⊗**, and rather than activating a single move, these controls are threaded through the whole system. So you can pull off different types of footplants, back and front foot-lifts and proper hippy jumps, all with various combinations of **○** and **⊗** with the existing controls.

Handplants work the same. **L1** is the universal button for grabbing things that aren't your board, and pressing as you pass the lip of the half-pipe to pull off a standard plant. Getting more complicated, **L1** with **○** gives you a one-footed plant, and doing different



Info

Format PS3 ETA 23 Jan Pub EA Dev EA Black Box Players 1-6 Web skate.ea.com **It's like** Trying to learn how to actually skate, only less painful and outdoorsy.

things with the right stick will give you tons of different poses – like **L1** and **→** on the stick for a stiffy handplant. These additions are pretty much perfect, worked seamlessly into an already super accomplished system to make it deeper and better.

Walk this way

Other changes are welcome but ultimately prove less successful. One massive change is that by pressing **A** you can now step off your board. It might not *sound* massive, if you've never played the glued-onto-the-board original in which six-inch kerbs were a constant, shin-threatening menace and sliding slowly, accidentally and backwards down two flights of stairs could lose you ten minutes' repositioning time, but it is. The problem is that the actual walking itself sucks, by the measure of every other game on PS3 which features walking of any kind. Turning is clumsy and unbelievably slow, and collision detection is laughably inconsistent – even using **○**



▲ Big air moves: incredible, until you realise your rotation is slightly, skull-crushingly wrong.



▲ Skitching - grabbing cars - makes you go fast, but looks surprisingly ugly.

to jump you'll have trouble scaling irregular heights which seem much smaller than the steps you can happily sprint up.

Similarly, being able to grab in-world items (using the hand-plant button, **H**) should be a game-changer. It means you can hang onto the back of moving cars to build up some serious speed on the roads (invariably resulting in wincing, tibia-busting collisions with other vehicles), and also shift around in-game obstacles - ramps, dumpsters, benches - to make custom skating lines. The latter is fine, if of limited practical use (the existing skate parks are way more fun



▲ Death races and traffic mix a lot like a soft, fast moving human body and a powerful car.

than anything I made myself). And though hitching rides with cars is undeniably fun, it also highlights how basic the game's vehicle design and behaviour is (they speed unrealistically round corners like target cars in last-gen GTA).

All of which sounds pretty downbeat, but isn't so sad really. These are good ideas, intended to deal with the biggest omissions in, and complaints about, the first Skate game. But they don't match

the quality and polish of the core controls, which means Skate 2 is a better game than the original, but also a less even one.

Nathan Ditum



Straight to bargain bin

With Nathan Ditum



I've recently become quite the expert on PS2 equestrian games, and I surprisingly don't hate **My Horse & Me 2**. Sure, the views of the painfully unattainable (for anyone who finds themselves buying budget horse games) country house are so blocky they could've been cross-stitched rather than rendered on a powerful computer. And the promise that you can customise your character 'so she looks just like you' actually just means

changing the colour of her hair and face. But the mechanics of the thing - the cleaning, feeding and riding - have a superior level of care and detail in them. Which in this case only means more care than being trampled to death by pounding thoroughbreds at Ascot, but hey, it's *something*.

Barbie Horse Adventures Riding Camp is almost identical to *My Horse And Me 2* (even the button for making the horse go is the same) except for two key points. Firstly, it stars Barbie, which nixes character customisation but gives you a massive wardrobe. And secondly, your riding instructor is a sexy older lady wearing what passes in porn films as a shorthand for lesbian uniform - leather gloves, tight trousers, and sternly tied back hair. This gave the whole thing a slightly charged atmosphere, and I kept walking Barbie up to the lady and pressing all the buttons to see if anything Jilly Cooper would happen. But it didn't, and all the awkwardness finally gave way to a listless monotony of cleaning, working and boredom - just like in real life.



I've already forgotten everything I learned playing *Clever Kids Pony World* last month, including the promise I made myself to put out my own eyes rather than play another *Clever Kids* game again. Which is why I now present - **Clever Kids Dino Land**! It's the same, essentially: a mix of pretend education (one game has you learn the cries of different dinosaurs, despite the fact that no one knows what they sounded like) and *Speak &*

Spell-standard gameplay. The stupid puzzle robot is noisy and distracting like the kid at school who'd bleat like a spooked sheep when he didn't understand something, and the graphics are more like blobs of colour which are near each other than accurate representations of anything that actually exists.

Abomination of the month

Playing **Sea Monsters: A Prehistoric Adventure** is a bit like going to the beach, if you're me. You spend a great deal of the time worrying that you look awful (in the case of *Sea Monsters* this is because you're some kind of poorly textured and shapeless water dinosaur, and you do), find yourself collecting fossils for no reason (put it down - they're not rare, it smells, and where the hell are you going to put it at home?) and if you go too deep into the water then you die. Which is understandable if you're me, a small pink mammal made weak by the luxuries of post-industrial capitalism, but less so if you're a water dinosaur who is *made to go in the water*. Stupid dinosaurs.





Little drummers

Patapon 2 Don Chaka

A good beat, but we've heard it before

096

Usually, when my eyes start playing up it's because it's midnight on deadline and I've started seeing in quintuple. But with Patapon 2, misfiring peepers are hardwired into the gameplay. Just like the original, this is a strategy game in which you guide an ever-growing tribe of little eyeballs with legs and spears through a series of missions, such as hunting creatures, attacking rival armies and defeating giant bosses. The hook is that you command your army by drumming on the face buttons in time to the music, using seven easy-to-remember drum commands – attack, retreat, advance and so on. String them together and the music and animation build into a sort of rhythmic frenzy, with your little soldiers singing your commands back to you as you march them triumphantly into battle.

Patapon 2 adds new unit types that you



Info

Format PSP ETA
Japanese import
Pub Sony Dev Pyramid
Players 1-4
Web snipurl.com/8vm4j **It's like** That dream where your eyes pop out and dance around with spears. Again.



ScorePole

Comes in level with Locoroco 2, but it's no match for Lumines II.



Providing you have a bit of rhythm, you can command unswerving loyalty from your eyes.

can unlock by experimenting with the Patapon Evolution Tree. Toripon, for instance, are like the cavalry but ride birds, Mahopon are teeny mages that throw fireballs, and Robopon have got massive hands which they use to smack enemies in the face. There are also loads of new Rarepon, the super-Patapon that you create by levelling up basic types, and these include Fuumya, which look like cats, Supengu (super penguins), and the little Buhyokko piggies.

The sound of the drums

The new units bring with them various tactical considerations – tree Patapon are susceptible to fire damage, for example, while Supengu are especially effective in cold conditions. One problem with playing the imported version of the game is that unless you read Japanese you'll struggle with the stat menus that explain all of this stuff, but it won't be as much of a problem if you've played the original because all the fundamentals are the same.

In fact, the only significant change in the gameplay comes with the new multiplayer mode. Worried about the madness of several players trying to control



New in Patapon 2 is 'four-eyed' multiplayer, in which a quartet of Heroes work together.



Fail to keep the drum beats tight and the tide of battle will rapidly turn against your army.



dozens of Patapon without knowing whose is whose, developer Pyramid chose to ignore it first time out, but has now found a solution with Heroes, which are particularly strong and independent Patapon with special stat-boosting masks. Fire up multiplayer and up to four people take control of a Hero apiece to defeat bosses and hatch giant, goodie-filled eggs. In practice it plays a lot like the regular game – especially since, unless you have three Patapon-playing friends within ad-hoc range, AI characters are subbed in to complete the team. Make the necessary arrangements though, and building rhythms together is fun – plus it's a much more entertaining way to collect resources than simply repeatedly playing the same levels.

The bottom line is that Patapon 2 is very similar to Patapon, but it just about gets away with it. Partly that's because there's loads more stuff (units, weapons and consequently strategic depth), partly because the core mechanic is still top fun (albeit exactly half as fresh as before), and partly because it seems ludicrous to criticise a game about dancing, warlike eyeballs for lack of originality.

Keza MacDonald





▲ The purple space ants chew up your base if they get through.

Bug hunt

Savage Moon

"You get the insects, I'll blow up the towers"

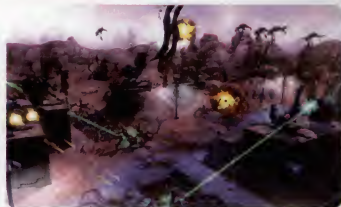
Tower defence games are one-sided real-time strategy efforts where you always play the defending team, and as such sound really boring. But they don't have to be, as Pixeljunk Monsters (one of the best games on PSN last year) and now Savage Moon (which sounds like a frowning goth band but isn't) show.

The deal is that it's the future and you have to protect asteroid mining operations from waves of insectocytes (basically the pointy bugs from Starship Troopers with some snakes and scorpions thrown in for kicks), which is really just an excuse for you to defend a base from a horde of crawly things. The central mechanic is all about resource management – deciding where to build your towers, what type to build, and whether to spend your limited credits on researching new types of towers, upgrading your current ones or just building more of them.

Bugging out

Savage Moon is balanced right in the sweet spot – it's simple enough that the basics can be grasped in a couple of rounds, but complex enough to be engaging for hours. So early on you'll figure out that you can funnel the insectocytes towards your level four guns with blocking towers, but a few levels later you'll be

Info
Format PSN ETA Out now Pub Sony Dev Acquire Players 1 Web snipurl.com/8gbpj It's like Pixeljunk Monsters on the moon, with Starship Troopers aliens.



▲ Lasers make a lame zapping sound but burn the bugs to ash in double-quick time.

panic-selling now irrelevant anti-air towers and using the credits to upgrade your last-line-of-defence lasers to fend off the wave 14 boss. Yes, sometimes the maps require multiple playthroughs before the right strategy becomes obvious (I often laid down too much anti-air cover too early and regretted it). And it's frustrating that later, tougher waves yield the same number of credits as the earlier, weaker ones so you have to plan sensibly from the start and get ahead of the game or everything will collapse like a house of cards. But treading that fine, punishing line between success and failure is what tower defence is all about, and Savage Moon is deep and playable enough to make it work.

Nathan Ditum



Japan Watch

This month's overseas action in a nutshell

Beatmania IIDX 15 DJ Troopers

Format PS2 Pub Konami Subtitles No



Attention all vapid celeb DJs hellbent on subjecting the public to your borked turntablism – until you've juggled beats to a caustic backdrop of screaming air raids and cascading bullets, as witnessed in Konami's 15th Beatmania outing, you're not fit to spin the decks at Scribes West.



Derby Time Online
Format PS3 Pub Sony Subtitles No
Featuring 1080p fetlock motion blur, thoroughbreds in giant hamster balls and tables of turf stats so impenetrable that even a Football Manager veteran would go blind on sight, Sony's networked nag-racer has something for everyone. And by something we mean horses.



Idolmaster SP: Missing Moon

Format PSP Pub Namco Bandai Subtitles No

Released in three different editions – each focusing on a different trio of dead-eyed wannabe J-pop stars – Idolmaster SP: Missing Moon tasks your inner svengali with nurturing your charges, picking winning outfits (tiny) and songs (catchy) to propel them to the big time. The last level? Escaping from the rehab toilet window, presumably.



Exotic Boxart Of The Month



Real Rode
Could the girl in the middle actually be playing me in my life and not the other way around? It would explain the thousand-yard stare and palpable sense of hopeless regret.



Pachi-Slot Vol 13: Neon Genesis Evangelion
"Our post-apocalyptic utopia is being overrun by monstrous beings! Quick, everyone! To the fruit machines!"



Pachitte Chonmage Tatsujin 15: Pachinko Fuyu no Sonata
Because nothing says 'touching romance' like half a ton of ballbearings clattering around the innards of a tumble dryer.



Elf hazard

The Lord Of The Rings Conquest

Star Wars: Battlefront gets a Middle-earth makeover

A confession: I don't actually hate orcs. However, having run the gauntlet of Conquest's woolly, joyless combat for what feels like the entire Third Age I can confirm that I hate killing them. The majority of the leathery victims in this Tolkein makeover of Star Wars: Battlefront are notched with a tiresome slash, slash, hack, HACK that's reminiscent of trying to saw through cheap meat with plastic cutlery while waiters bundle you to the floor. Frankly, if the game hadn't dangled the carrot of hobbit murder in front me, I'd have struggled to liberate Middle-earth at all.

Info
Format PS3 **ETA**
Out now **Pub** EA
Dev Pandemic
Players 1-16 **Web**
pandemicstudios.com/conquest
It's like Trying to unscrew a thousand jar lids with greasy hands while people in Halloween masks kick you in the nuts.

Conquest is split into two campaigns, each containing nine levels. The first – The War Of The Ring – charts the defeat of Sauron via LOTR's biggest battles, including Helm's Deep, Minas Tirith and Pelennor Fields. Complete this as the forces of good and your reward is to be thoroughly evil in The Rise Of Sauron – an original story that begins with Frodo *failing* to destroy the Ring and takes the fight back to the pompous hippy elves in Rivendell via the hobbit-lousy Shire.

We hates them

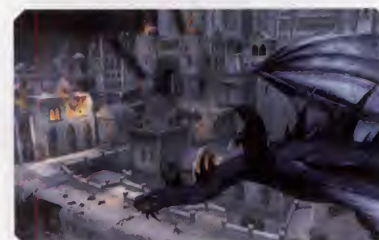
In practice, both campaigns boil down to a series of mass battles in which you fight alongside scores of AI allies to capture strategic 'nodes' while flitting between a quartet of character classes – warrior, archer, scout and mage. Fail to meet any time-specific or escort objectives, or use up all your lives and it's back to the start. Conversely, make good progress – sap morale by killing officers, say – and, as the tide turns, you'll get the opportunity to play as a hero character such as Gandalf, Legolas or Aragorn.



▲ The bigger they come, the harder they repeatedly smash your face into the cobbles.



▲ Conquest's world is authentically realised. Sadly that means a murky palette of browns.



▲ Getting to play as an evil Nazgûl is more fun than being good, but 'more' is a relative term.

So far, so very Star Wars: Battlefront, even down to the could-do-better graphics that feel optimised for lag-free online rather than gob-smacking offline fun. No bad thing, in theory. However, the majority of weapons in Battlefront were ranged, whereas Conquest is largely about melee combat, and the gamer-manipulated camera just isn't up to the close work this requires. Add this to Conquest's (admittedly accurate) gloomy, brown environments and the factory line combat, and you're looking at a seemingly endless succession of chaotic, murky scraps in which it's a toss-up as to what will do you in first – wrestling the camera, the stabbing of grim-faced opponents off-screen or the growing feeling that this is a game that's missed its sweet-spot of public interest by a good six years. There's a chance that online play will emerge as

Conquest's saving grace – we'll let you know when we've had a chance to play on the live servers after release – but on the evidence of what's here, it seems unlikely.

Paul Fitzpatrick

Ring-o-Meter

Just how irresistible is Conquest?





Weekend warrior

NPPL Championship Paintball 2009

You've got red on you. And green. And blue

Because this is what you want, right? Cramped arenas dotted with inflatable cover, guns that don't so much buck and kick as phut, phut apologetically, and, to cap it off, when you do 'kill' someone they put an arm in the air and then, bizarrely, discombobulate out of existence. It's an awkward fudge, and compared to the full sex that is Call Of Duty, feels like five minutes of unsatisfying over the sweater action. Which is still overselling the experience.

The closest competitor for NPPLCP2009 (oh yes) is probably Unreal Tournament III, which is also arena-based, focused on speed and scoring, and – crucially – a lot more exciting. And we don't even like Unreal Tournament III.

This is pro paintball, which means that rather than being chased around Epping Forest by men booted out of the TA for being too intense, here you compete in enclosed courts the size of a seven-a-side football pitch. Your teammates specialise at playing in front, mid or back positions, and have corresponding skill attributes – none of which are noticeable once the match starts.

The goal: capture an actual flag and return it to your base. Basic movement and aiming work fine (there's even a

Info

Format PS3 **ETA** US import
Pub Activision **Dev** Sand Grain Studios
Players 1 (14 online)
Web Activision.com **It's like** A grim future in which games with real guns are banned.



What kind of things have to go wrong in your life before you become a pro paintballer?

cute slide move for getting into cover), but the actual shooting less so. Because the paintballs are so hard to spot you can find yourself lit up before you've even registered a threat. Nor is the chance to upgrade your paint hopper and other kit a huge incentive to keep playing through the league structure. The one enjoyable aspect of this crushingly repetitive game is the cheating. Get splattered and you can try to wipe the paint off by stopping a swing-o-meter device at the right

point. With no punishment for getting caught, there's no reason not to try it every time, revelling in your hate figure status like the Joey Barton of paintball. **Tim Clark**



PlayList

Essential tunes to download this month

Antony And The Johnsons The Crying Light

Format Album **ETA** Out now **Price** £7.99

The big guy with the voice of a miserable angel returns with the follow-up to his Mercury Prize-winning I Am A Bird Now. More harrowing than its predecessor, but seldom do albums come so epically orchestral or grand in their scope.

myspace.com/antonyandthejohnsons



Lily Allen It's Not Me, It's You

Format Album **ETA** 9 February **Price** £7.99

Gobby UK pop queen finally gets round to doing that whole singing thing again. Gone is the pop-reggae strut of Alright, Still, replaced by a slicker electronic production, but it's the same old Lil, if those lyrics about drug-snorting politicians and tin-headed WAG-wannabees are anything to go by. And you wouldn't want it any other way.

myspace.com/lilyallen



Tinchy Stryder Take Me Back

Format Track **ETA** Out now **Price** £0.79

Pocket-sized grime geezer Tinchy is out to pull a Wiley with this Take Me Back – an electro-pop hit with sing-along Auto Tune vocals and a big '80s-style chorus courtesy of crooner Taio Cruz that might just have what it takes to leave a sizable dent in the charts.

myspace.com/tinchystryder



Download of the month Franz Ferdinand Ulysses

Format Track **ETA** Out now **Price** £0.79

Arch art-popsters shimmy back for LP number three, Tonight: Franz Ferdinand, dropping this teaser as they go. Ulysses realises the electro influences promised for the album: scratchy guitars, squelchy keys, and a chorus to ignite the dancefloor. myspace.com/franzferdinand



Head
to
head



Madagascar Escape 2 Africa

vs Bolt

Dreamworks' zoo crew take on Disney's dog

100

Forget the film's plot about zoo animals leaving Madagascar only to crash-land in Africa, this is just a series of quickie mini-games loosely strung together by the mutterings of a hyperactive lemur.



STORY



Bolt is the doggy star of a TV show who doesn't realise his 'powers' are just special effects, but the game is cleverly set in that series, so you get to use the sonic barks and ground pounds.

Races, a game of two-aside footy, using a hippo's sizable behind to shut suitcases. It's like a buffet of fun, but, thanks to the lazy execution and bad design, one laced with E-Coli.



GAMEPLAY



Verging on repetitive, but simple enough to be friendly to the kidz. Bolt bashes up enemies with super combos, while sidekick super girl Penny is all about stealthy platforming.

Man alive, there's no detail in the environments at all, and the furry jungle characters have been rendered so badly they look ill. Walking through solid objects is a regular occurrence, too.



GRAPHICS



The odd missing texture aside, this does a good job of transferring the smooth CG look of the film to PS3. And there are sweet slapstick effects when Bolt is battering enemies.

None. The stars of the film – Chris Rock, Ben Stiller – decided (wisely) to steer clear, so the minimal dialogue is provided by charmless sound-a-likes.



LAUGHS



Straight from the You've Been Framed school of comedy – things falling on people, or them getting a face full of floor. It might not be big or clever, but it is thoroughly tried and tested.

LOSER

Everything from the ideas to the backdrops feels rushed, and if this isn't a PS2 game under a layer of clumsily applied PS3 polish I'll eat my safari trousers.



3



VERDICT

WINNER



A worthy companion piece to the film – against all odds the stealth is actually fun, making it perfect for training your nippers up before MGS5. C'mon Kojima, it's so happening.

6



❑ "Wait, didn't I fight you already today?"
The repetitive combat system pales fast.

Gone ronin

Way Of The Samurai 3


Phrasebook ready? Let's go adventuring

Like a Border Collie with three legs, Way Of The Samurai is flawed, but fun to play with anyway. The setup is that you're a wandering samurai in feudal Japan who stumbles injured into the town of Gishu Amana. Three factions struggle for control of the town – the Fujimori clan, the Ouka bandits, and the townspeople – and the flow of the game is determined by the choices you make and characters you side with. There are 20 different endings available, so the idea is that you play it through multiple times.

Yo, Jimbo!

The medieval world of muddy paths and wooden huts is attractive if not gorgeous, and easy to navigate thanks to a fast-travel teleport feature and easily marked event triggers. Cut-scenes are more like branching story points – they're interactive, so you decide what your character says and does. On the first run through you'll mostly be drawing your sword with **△** and threatening to slit the throat of anyone you meet.

The focus on story depth is Samurai 3's biggest selling point, but also a reason why importing it might not be a great idea – at the very least you'll need to learn 'which way to the



Info
Format PS3 ETA Japan import Pub Spike Dev Acquire Players 1 Web samurai3.jp It's like If Niko Bellic was searching for that special someone in a Kurosawa period movie.



❑ Biscuit-headed bandits were the scourge of the Gishu Amana townspeople.

nearest Shinto shrine, please?" in Japanese or you'll get hopelessly lost. And if the repetition of multiple playthroughs sounds tiresome, then the samey combat and fetch-quest mission design will drive you nuts. It's a potentially compelling sandbox adventure, if you have the patience to excuse its flaws, but it all depends on how much you like playing with wandering samurai and, to a lesser extent, amputee

pets. Here's hoping the Western localisation won't be butchered by the appalling voice acting that ruined Way Of The Samurai 2.
Keza MacDonald



BluMovies

HD films to feed your next-gen disc player



RocknRolla

Director Guy Ritchie **Starring** Thandie Newton, Gerard Butler **Out** 26 Jan

So this is what people mean when they say that Guy Ritchie 'is back on form' – that having failed at doing anything new or different he's essentially remade his first two films with different actors bleating out the same nonsense about shootin' each uvver and doing crime. Fun, but rubbish really.



Tropic Thunder

Director Ben Stiller **Starring** Ben Stiller, Robert Downey Jr **Out** 26 Jan

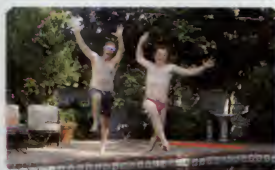
Jack Black, Ben Stiller and Robert Downey Jr are dropped into the jungle to make a war flick – only to find themselves fighting the natives for real. All three bring the belly laughs but it's Tom Cruise's fat, foul-mouthed movie mogul who steals the show.



Step Brothers

Director Adam McKay **Starring** Will Ferrell, John C Reilly **Out** 2 Feb

Ferrell and Reilly are in their comfort zone playing unemployed manchildren who find themselves forced together when their parents get hitched. The gags are mostly from the getting hit in the balls school of comedy, but there's plenty of them and Ferrell's lazy moron act makes even the 'mangina' jokes worth grimacing through.



Movie of the month Get Smart

Director Peter Segal **Starring** Steve Carell, Anne Hathaway **ETA** 2 Feb

This slick spy series remake reminds us of two important things: that Steve Carell is really funny when he's playing an idiot, and that Anne Hathaway is so pretty that looking at her for too long will cook your eyes like frogs on the sun. Gentle laughs and a lovely lady for the win.

Game 4-a-date

Love & Prizes!

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And who better to share your awesome prize with than your one true love that you discovered on **Game 4 A Date**? So, to be in with a chance of winning this great prize register at **www.game4adate.com** and follow the links to the competition. *Good luck!*

visit: **www.game4adate.com**

Game 4-a-date

* Normal monthly subscription rate is £9.99. You may cancel your membership at any time.

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History Civil War Secret Missions

Format PS3 ETA US import Pub Activision



You learn a lot about the American Civil War from this first-person shooter. Most of it wrong. For instance, 19th Century soldiers are superhuman, and can take three rifle blasts to the face before feeling a little bit dizzy. Cannons may decimate conveniently placed watch towers, but will not scratch tents, and sniper rifles take ten minutes to load. Oh, and most importantly, it's possible to talk about the subject for hours without ever mentioning the



sticky issue of slavery. Add to that a framerate that's juddery like a hand-cranked projector and it's like the game has its own secret mission – making you turn it off. **Rachel Penny**



Age Of Booty

Format PSN download ETA Out now Pub Capcom



Welcome to real-time strategy with an eye-patch and tricorn hat. As a pirate captain your job is to sail the isometric 3D seas, grabbing resources, plundering ships and riddling enemy galleons with cannon fire on a bright cartoon map. Fairly decent swashbuckling, then, and easy to pick up. Any loot you grab can be spent on upgrading your vessel, and all you need to do to win is capture more ports than your enemy. Beware, though – we had a bit of a struggle finding



people to play with us online, and the single-player is ultimately a bit soulless and easy, as if all the little AI sailors have been at the rum. Fun with friends, but best avoided like the press gang alone. **Rachel Penny**



Naruto Ultimate Ninja Storm

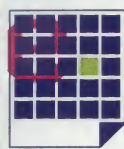
Format PS3 ETA Out now Pub Atari



You roll into town looking to dish out a few Shuriken, maybe burn some chakra energy laying the ninja hurt on some bad guys, when an old lady asks you to find her some red flowers. Some other guy wants some blue flowers, and suddenly you're the town errand boy. Sure, Naruto looks ok, with its fancy cel-shading. And the combat might be a riot of limbs and special moves. And, yes, there are 25 playable characters, from pink-haired lady ninja Sakura to



chubby Choji. But the game insists on sticking it all in the middle of an RPG swamp with load times that would test the patience of a tree. Too little bang for your buck... **Rachel Penny**



Release Schedule

Coming soon to a
PlayStation near you

	Publisher	ETA	Format
Skate 2	EA	23 Jan	PS3
Battle Fantasia	505 Games	6 Feb	PS3
Destroy All Humans Path Of The Furon	THQ	13 Feb	PS3
FEAR 2 Project Origin	Warner Bros	13 Feb	PS3
Hail To The Chimp	Gamecock	13 Feb	PS3
Red Faction Guerrilla	THQ	13 Feb	PS3
Bolt	Disney	13 Feb	PS3
The Godfather II	EA	20 Feb	PS3
Silent Hill Homecoming	Konami	20 Feb	PS3
Street Fighter IV	Capcom	20 Feb	PS3
Wheelman	Midway	20 Feb	PS3
Killzone 2	Sony	27 Feb	PS3
Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection	Sega	27 Feb	PS3
50 Cent Blood On The Sand	THQ	Feb	PS3
Burnout Paradise: Ultimate Box	EA	Feb	PS3
Damnation	Codemasters	Feb	PS3
Rise Of The Argonauts	Codemasters	Feb	PS3
Rock Band 2	EA	Feb	PS3
X-Blades	SouthPeak	Feb	PS3
Resident Evil 5	Capcom	13 Mar	PS3
Heroes Over Europe	Atari	Mar	PS3
Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising	Codemasters	Mar	PS3
Rag Doll Kung Fu	Sony	Mar	PSN
Resistance Retribution	Sony	Mar	PSP
Rock Revolution	Konami	Mar	PS3
Stormrise	Sega	Mar	PS3
The Chronicles Of Riddick: AOD	Atari	Mar	PS3
Tom Clancy's HAWX	Ubisoft	Mar	PS3
UFC 2009 Undisputed	THQ	Mar	PS3
Wanted Weapons Of Fate	Warner Bros	Mar	PS3
Watchmen: The End Is Nigh	Warner Bros	Mar	PSN
WWE Legends Of Wrestlemania	THQ	Mar	PS3
Batman Arkham Asylum	Eidos	May	PS3
inFamous	Sony	May	PS3
Ghostbusters	Atari	Jun	PS3
Afro Samurai	Atari	Jul	PS3
Bayonetta	Sega	2009	PS3
Borderlands	Take Two	2009	PS3
DC Universe Online	SOE	2009	PS3
Mafia II	Take Two	2009	PS3
MAG	Sony	2009	PS3
Prototype	Activision	2009	PS3
The Agency	SOE	2009	PS3

! All release dates are accurate at time of press but liable to change.



READY MADE EXCUSE #27

Pull a sickie for...
Wheelman

“I had an accident with a hedgehog and the mower and now I've got some form of post-traumatic stress. Back by mid-March the doc says.”



▲ Online PES with more than two players is sad like being born into a family of Charlton fans.



▲ If you've any sense you'll stick to international sides – the unlicensed club strips are awful.

Mid-table mediocrity

Pro Evolution Soccer 2009

Freshly patched, but still a bit League One

At launch PES 2009 was a massive shambles online. Crippled by lag and sever problems, it was almost completely broken. But thanks to a pre-Christmas patch Konami's big-name footy game is finally fit for the new season.

There are three different modes on offer: one-on-one, two-on-two and Legends, where you take a player created in the Become A Legend mode (PES's shameless rip-off of FIFA's Be A Pro equivalent) and play against the game with three other men. One-on-one matches are now almost entirely lag-free. Okay, so there's still the odd Heuresho Gomes-sponsored moment of madness – we scored a goal on the counter attack from an opponent's beauty of a 30-yard free-kick after the



ball came flying out of our net because the game *simply failed to register it* – but mercifully these moments are few and far between.

Unfortunately, the update hasn't had quite the same impact on two vs two games or the Legends mode, which, although smoother than before, still have moments of unplayable, match-breaking lag. The ball jumps around, players move so erratically you'll think you're suffering blackouts, and sometimes the match will inexplicably pause itself. In a game built on precision and split-second timing, trying to judge tackles and runs in the midst of these problems is like asking a brain surgeon to remove a blood clot with a trowel.

In all honesty, though, you won't be missing much by ignoring these modes. In two vs two you're completely at the mercy of your partner – unlike FIFA you don't get penalised for being a ball hog. And while taking your Become A Legend character online sounds interesting, the reality is it's

a destitute man's version of FIFA's 10 vs 10 matches on a much smaller – but strangely less stable – scale.

PES's sign-up process and online menu systems are also a ballache compared to FIFA's streamlined efforts. As well as a PSN login you'll also need a Konami ID before you can play, which makes the whole thing a convoluted mess of baffling multiple usernames and passwords. Stupid. And your reward for getting past the Byzantine login is a limited and dated online infrastructure – lobbies are still named after Master League 'favourites' like Ordaz and Valeny, the game can't find friends from your XMB – you have to know their Konami ID to invite them to a game – and even worse, there's no way to filter the quality of your opponents.

The sad truth, then, is that while PES' arcade-centric gameplay may

make for more naturally exciting games of footy than FIFA, its current online mode simply can't compete with its rival's imagination, ambition or quality.

Dave Meikleham

What you do in... PES 2009

5% Hating that you can't use option files online – the strips suck.

10% Forgetting the flaws when you hit a 25-yard belter.

10% Cursing your frying-pans-for-hands keeper.



33% Wondering why the servers can't handle four players while EA manages 20.

17% Endlessly passing for points in Legends, before realising it's a bit pointless.

Thinking Seabass for the patch that's almost killed lag in one-on-one games.

PlayStation®

Official Magazine - UK

5



Other than some occasionally wonky AI when you don't have enough human players, Be A Pro 10 vs 10 is outstanding.

Treble-winner

FIFA 09

New online modes see EA coast to the title

This year's FIFA has more online options than Arsene Wenger has precocious but fragile transcontinental youngsters. The list of ranked matches, online leagues and cups is exhaustive, and all presented in a clean, streamlined menu system, on quick, reliable servers. There's everything you'd expect – quick friendlies, online cups, even the excellent option to build your own club with friends – as well as a couple of new modes that really push the online tech.

These include the Interactive League, where you pick your favourite club and then play their real-life fixtures against opposition fans week by week. The combined results determine where your team sits in the online league. It can be frustrating waiting for fixtures – especially during international breaks – but the sense of contributing to something bigger than a single game is addictive. And there's also the much-trumpeted Adidas Live Season, which updates the stats of league players according to their recent real life performances. This is a brilliant but basically still unproven idea – it's tough to tell if it's having any tangible effect on

Dev talk



"10 vs 10 is changing the way people play online games. People look at themselves differently as online players."
David Rutter
Line producer,
EA Vancouver

how the game plays, and the idea of paying for something that may or may not be making a difference (your first league is free, subscribing to others costs £4.99 each) is crackers. It's the only element of FIFA 09's online side which could be described as a flaw.

The professional

The most exciting new mode, though, is definitely Be A Pro 10 vs 10. Here, you and 19 other gamers all take control of a single player and play a full virtual match. And, technically at least, it works well – it's sensibly designed so that AI players fill in for missing men or dropouts (there's an option to allow player switching as normal, which is useful if you're playing with only three or four) and lag is limited.

The problem is actually playing like a team. Headsets are still pretty rare on PSN, so even if you're all mic'd up, communicating with teammates can be a nightmare. And quite a few of the players you meet – often novices and idiots – desert their selected



Info

Format PS3 **ETA** Out now **Pub** EA
Dev EA Canada **Players** 1-20
Web fifa09.ea.com/uk **It's like** A realistic simulation of the beautiful game mixed with some of EA's best production values.

position entirely and spend the game aimlessly chasing after the ball. Thankfully, FIFA rewards or punishes you appropriately for selfish or unselfish play by increasing and decreasing your stats – which affects your online rank – for things like well-judged passes or holding onto the ball too long. And, when everyone plays to the strengths of their assigned positions, it works like a rewarding, ten-player co-op.

To sum up like Jamie Redknapp in a pair of distractingly tight trousers, then: this is a huge and ambitious online offering. The basics are smooth and hugely accomplished, and while the newer modes aren't always perfect, they're never short of playable, which is why ultimately FIFA is in an online league of its own. **Dave Meikleham**





106

Vet set

Call Of Duty World At War

We will fight them on the beaches, and various other maps



Info

Format PS3 **ETA** Out now
Pub Activision
Dev Treyarch
Players 1-16 **Web** callofduty.com
It's like Dressing up in grandad's old army fatigues and playing Modern Warfare.

John Madden and World At War may not seem like the most obvious comparison, but there's a new entry in the annals of 'here's the same thing you paid for last year'. Gentlemen, welcome to the WW2 re-skinning of Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare.

COD '09

But let's be clear. Modern Warfare is probably *the* online shooter of this generation, with weapons, maps, and a beautiful perks system all tuned to perfection. So World At War might be totally derivative, but it's also stealing from the best, and what tweaks it does

make don't interfere with those brilliant foundations. Apart from the appearance of Nazi zombies...

From the top, then. After the latest patch, finding a game through matchmaking is super-speedy, although once or twice after games I lost connection to my team. You begin with ready-made classes and a generic weapon set, but after the first two or three games you'll unlock the ability to create a custom class, and this is where World At War really takes off. You can choose your starting gun, combat perks, and as you become more proficient (read: kill more people) you can bolt-on further kit such as sights.

These perks were the key factor behind Modern Warfare's longevity, and sensibly World At War leaves them largely unchanged. Do you simply want more stopping power, the chance for a last shot as you're dying on the ground, or the ability to run a little bit faster? If that sounds like an easy choice, bear in

mind that I took the latter. Noble knife specialist, you see, and no, it's not cheating or cowardly.

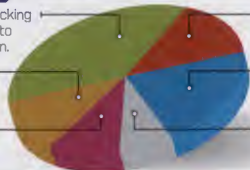
Flash! Argh...

The big brother's hand-me-downs approach also extends to the weapon set: modern guns are basically re-skinned (none of the previous WW2-era COD games had weapons with this much clout), flashbangs are replaced with flares, and a lovely trip mine does the job Modern Warfare's claymores do – namely, removing the knees of unwary opponents.

Support forces come in the form of tanks, air strikes, recon flights and dogs. The effectiveness of the tanks varies hugely depending on situation and map: they initially seem pretty unbeatable, but mine the roads and co-ordinate with your team and they can be taken down. Dogs are triggered after seven straight kills and, to a variously-accented and totally

What you do in... COD WAW

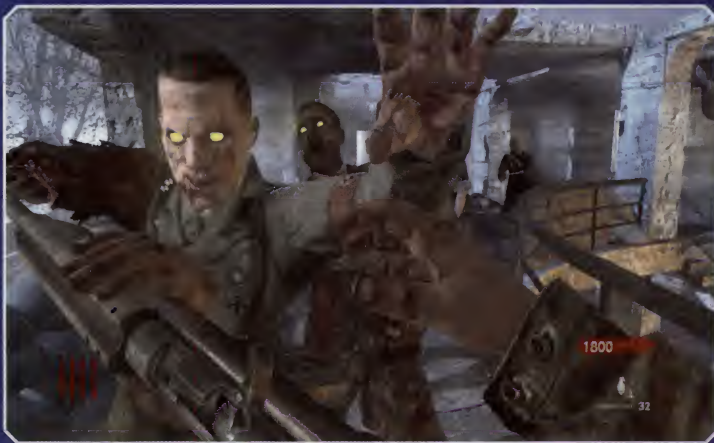
35% Obsessively checking your kill to death ratio to make sure you still pwn.
13% Panic-jabbing grenades off walls to land at your feet.
10% Killing snipers RIGHT IN THEIR STUPID FACES.



15% Cursing campers with the foulest language at your command.
20% Camping.
7% Whimpering as you run away from angry attack dogs.



Identical screen pop-ups – points, grenade icons etc – add to the 're-skinned COD4' feel.



The only really new bit – the brilliantly daft survival Zombie Nazi mode – is the highlight.

awesome cry of 'release ze dogs', will sprint after your opponents for a frantic 60 seconds. If enemies panic, you'll easily rack up kills in double figures. Meanwhile, keeping cool and moving so they're bottled in your sights is essential if you're on the receiving end.

As for the maps, there are some gems. Dome, for example, looks huge but is actually a small and cluttered space that tempts you into running around like a wildman – a tactic that tends to result in either getting killed lots or hitting ten-kill streaks. The Hangar level has an open indoor space peppered with small WW2 aircraft and ringed by walkways, which are themselves vulnerable to attack from outside the building. Most maps are camper heaven, but thankfully the division of playlists into beginner, general and hardcore means you'll only come across really boring tactics on the latter. World At War's online community is a relatively gung-ho one,

and so the game hits a happy medium – it's arcadey and quick enough for 15-minute blasts every so often, but the perks system and the constant levelling-up add real depth for the committed player.

And if you're after something different, the Nazi Zombies mode sets you and three others against an endless undead horde, with only a ruined house as protection. Running around in a panic, rebuilding barriers and shooting meatbags is frantic and fun, even if it does make us yearn for a PS3 version of Left 4 Dead *even more*. But while World At War doesn't get much wrong, there is one big caveat. COD4 has almost all of this, plus one of the finest first-person shooter campaigns ever created. If you've already got Modern Warfare then WAW might not be worth 40

notes given the competition right now, and if you haven't then you really ought to try COD4 first. WAW's fundamentals can't be knocked, though. **Rich Stanton**



Online round-up

With **Leon Hurley**



Something's terribly, terribly wrong. I'm winning. Repeatedly. Maybe this is my niche: an inexplicable talent for **Shaun White Snowboarding** online. Could I make money out of this? Quick, check Google and see if there's some kind of league that I

could... no, wait, I'm crap and it was all just beginner's luck. Shame, it was fun while it lasted and the Burnout-style, spot-the-join off/online system is pretty cool – who needs lobbies? Although whoever thought it would be funny to be able to knock people over with snowballs is an idiot. I spent five out of every ten minutes flat on my ass thanks to an endless volley of icy incoming, which is what eventually made me call BS and log off.

I'm thinking of starting an outreach programme for the people playing **Brothers In Arms Hell's Highway** online. If we can all donate a few pence then the 70 or so people I found playing it can all have a copy of a proper game, or a stick – *something* better than this. Have they never heard of Call Of Duty? Or is there some subset of the human race that enjoys games with a stuttering framerate? The only positive thing about it is that the music reminds me of Band Of Brothers which I've just got on Blu-ray – five seconds of which is enough to blast away the memory of BIA like a really dull moth in a flamethrower jet.



I have a message for anyone who wants to drive a monster truck when playing **Motorstorm: Pacific Rift** online. Don't. Seriously. There isn't a word I can print for the kind of fury generated by being run over and crushed by them again and again. It's not big... alright it is big,

but it's not clever. Especially when all I can do back is sort of bump into them like a fat kid attacking a bouncy castle. If everyone in the world can just agree to stop using the big rigs then we'll all get on fine. I *really* like Pacific Rift's multiplayer – it's chunky and loads of fun, like smashing things with hammers, only faster and muddier. So don't spoil it for me.

Download of the month

Next time your parents/guardian/parole officer gives you a disapproving look as you mention games, sit them down in front of **Bitter**. It's the first of PSN's Shoot series and it's practically culture. The project sees world famous directors helping a bunch of no-names create short films based on (warning – incoming PR concept-o-blah) the essence of PlayStation: Discover, Create, Play, Share, Connect and Challenge. In this case Michael Winterbottom, who directed A Mighty Heart, produces Joel Wilson and Jamie Campbell's comedy Bitter. It's about a father meeting his young daughter's repellent new boyfriend. The ending is abrupt but John Sessions' turn as the odious, aging boyf is great stuff.



mail@opm



All-out war, swapping sides, Clarkson's barnet, a games-made man writes, and the button-eyed hessian face of PlayStation.

Hero worship

A couple of months back I read an article about PlayStation's lack of a 'hero' - Xbox has Master Chief and Nintendo has Mario. Well, I've bought LittleBigPlanet and I have decided that sackboy is most certainly going to be - if he isn't already - the face of PlayStation's future. I say this because, well, do I really need to explain? LittleBigPlanet is everywhere.

Dan Nevil, by email

We love sackboy as much as the next wannabe developer, but we can't help

From PlayStation hopes and fears to technical queries, this is the place to come for answers

Email us at opm@futurenet.com or write to Letters, OPM, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

feeling that if it comes down to a physical fight between an asexual space marine, a fat Italian plumber and our lad, we'll only end up stitching him back up for weeks.

★ Teachers pet

Having bought LittleBigPlanet and made a level involving rigged glass slides and musical cars, I came to the sudden realisation that I could make anything! At the same time, I received a heap of science revision. We were told to make it fun for ourselves, so, while other people made posters I made a science level in LBP. It involves something called the reflex arc, and will hopefully help me remember it, and maybe others the same age as me. I'll publish it as 'Little Big Revision' and my username is Snello.

Alex Snelson, by email

Take that mainstream press! And they said that gaming would be the ruin of this great nation's youth. Instead it's turning them all into physics teachers. Wait, what? Have a year's subscription to OPM to marginally increase your coolness.

Russian doll

I was just thinking how boring shooters have become. Like Call Of Duty 4. It was a great game but the plot was quite boring,



✓ Alex Snelson built his science revision in LBP.



✓ Sackboy is now the face of all PlayStation.

the westerners (USA and Britain) stop the Russians from triggering Armageddon. How awesome would it be to play as the modern Russian forces defending their country from the Americans, who are seizing oil supplies across world? It would be pretty cool to have a massive firefight in Red Square, with tanks and artillery and a huge set-piece where St Basil's Cathedral is destroyed. Having just your trusty AK-47 and a Dragunov sniper rifle to see you through would really make gun battles more intense! Or getting to drive a T-95 tank in the Siberian wasteland to defend an oil refinery - that would be great! And imagine a sniper mission where you have to take out a military leader by sneaking across the border without being spotted. I think this sort of thing would really make it stand out from all the other FPSs, most of which just feel like being told to kill the Chinese by someone with a thick American accent.

Sam Povey, by email

Obviously you're *completely wrong* about Call Of Duty 4's plot. Seeing Gaz's little baseball cap fly off in the final scene of Modern Warfare has been seared into our hearts for all time. But otherwise it's not such a bad idea Mr Povey. Or, should we say, Mr Putin.

What's on my hard drive



Craig Robertson, Manchester

Music

Celldweller, Deftone, Another Dead Hero, Massive Attack, Boards Of Canada and more.

Photo

My band (Another Dead Hero) live at Manchester Academy, Tomb Raider Underworld wallpaper... that's about it.



Video

Tomb Raider Underworld, Far Cry 2 and Resident Evil 5.

Game

Assassin's Creed, Far Cry 2, GTA IV, MGS4, COD4, Ratchet & Clank, FIFA 08, Eye Of Judgment and a lot more!

Friends

All of my band and some ADHD fans, plus a handful of people off the EU PlayStation Forum.

Tell us what's on your hard drive! Email us at opm@futurenet.com

Lap dancer

What everyone needs is a Top Gear game. It makes sense, you could have stars in the reasonably priced car, with downloadable new characters. There could be a Stig power lap, challenges – like an endurance race from London to Oslo, and a Midnight Club-style upgrade shop complete with gaffer tape and sails. It makes sense; racing for the guys, Hammond for the ladies.

Robert Hobbs, by email

Great idea but it'll never happen. No developer has created a graphics engine that can cope with accurately rendering Clarkson's thinning barnet. Also, we should caution you that the last game we recall the BBC putting out was FightBox, which we overscored badly with a 1/10.

Flash flood

Operation Flashpoint 2 is looking hot, and I'm talking Jessica Alba hot! It's taken my attention away from Killzone 2 and World At War. I'm not a war-fighting-machine-gun-conflict-nut, but it's taken my breath away for so many reasons. First of all, there's a level of realism that even a novice like myself can appreciate. I've seen Abrams tanks and a Javelin anti-tank missile in COD4, but the Black Hawk helicopters make OF2 seriously interesting. Imagine playing co-op where, if you're a newbie, the veteran players will be the ones telling you what to do, until you earn your right to shove the innocent rookies into the line of fire? There's also the potential for downloadable content. The developer seems so obsessed with accurate military kit that surely when the US army changes something they're going to want to keep it up to date for more informed fans? I can't wait because brutal and hard though it might be, it could take shooters to a whole new level.

Tom White, by email

Operation Flashpoint 2's ultra-real battlefield promises to serve up some amazing sights. The only worry is whether we'll be able to stay alive for more than two minutes to see any of them.

Metal head

I believe my near fetish for Metal Gear Solid and its genetics-laced story contributed to the fact I'm now doing a genetics degree! I want to show perceptive readers (and their parents) that games culture is anything but harmful. I've played games all my life and my gaming career has been nothing but constructive. For example: Metal Gear

Tom White can't wait for Flashpoint 2 to 'go loud'.



Q I want to upgrade my PS3's hard drive. Will I void my warranty if I do this?

A No, but make sure you refer to the instructions provided in the manual (see it at playstation.com/manual/pdf/PS3-02_03-1.9_1.pdf). Please be aware that the hard drive must be a 2.5" SATA HDD and that you take full responsibility when upgrading.

Should MGS4 be on the National Curriculum? (Er, no.)



taught me about nuclear war and cloning. Ico taught me about natural beauty and the resilience of friendship in the face of Goliath-sized obstacles. Manhunt and Silent Hill taught me about the dark side of human nature. And Pro Evo taught me the offside trap! You don't learn any of that in school. I'm a gamer, always was, always will be. So can I get a 'up-yours' to those smarmy Conservative MPs? As Obama says "Yes we can".

Mark Deleany, by email

Can't help but feel you've taken the free world's glorious new leader slightly out of context there, but we appreciate the sentiment. Write back again when you've worked out how to splice ladies with scorpions or something.

Captive audience

This is not your usual moan about FIFA vs PES. My problem lies with the way these games are scored 9/10 when neither deserves it. The AI players are a problem that has blighted both games for a long time. I'm sure you're familiar with this example: you're chasing the winger back when he gets a cross in. There's only one attacker and three defenders tracking back. Then you see that the defenders have stopped at the edge of the area allowing the striker to score. This and other frustrating moments happen on a regular basis. If the dev team responsible watched or played the real thing then this wouldn't happen, as their understanding of football would be better. We'll always buy these games, not because they're good but, simply because we love football – this should be reflected in your reviews.

Graham Spearman, by email

You're right about the AWOL defenders, but we suspect that accurately modelling a complex 22-man sport is *slightly* harder than watching Sky Sports News all day.

Off the Wall



Choice cuts from the OPM Facebook group



Brainy idea

"They should make a game where you ARE a zombie... You could munch away on the poor and unfortunate, digesting their intestines merrily..."

Chris Osborne



Foxy lady

"More cunning than a fox that has graduated with a Masters degree in cunning from Cunningham's University. Hah."

Jen Stunt



Speedy sick

"A Sonic film!?! I'd rather eat my own vomit..."

Laura Varley



Girl talk

"WOOWOO WOOWOO WOOWOO WOOWOO! Oestrogen overload alert!"

Johnboyy Cole



Fan letter

"I like Tim and I think it is rather unfair that he got a restraining order against me."

Joe McLachlan



Dead Space

"Eugh. Scary and weird human-like things with crazy spikes sticking out of everywhere just aren't my thing."

Stewie Hitchcock



Sweet!

"59p for a chocolate bar?! You can (almost) get four fudges for that..."

Holly Cooper

Send your questions to:
opm@futurenet.com



PS3

Essential collection

Build the ultimate PS3 library with our no-filler guide to the best next-gen games so far



Platformer

LittleBigPlanet

Unleash your inner Miyamoto by creating and sharing your own levels online using the brilliantly simple but canyon-deep editing tools in Sony's phenomenal platformer. Absolutely essential.

10 Pub Sony
Dev Media Molecule

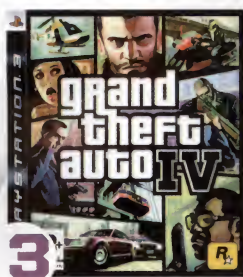


Shooter

Call Of Duty 4 Modern Warfare

The SAS and US Marines invite you to fight the war on terror as Call Of Duty dumps WW2 for a modern-day setting. A beautiful, brutal and near flawless shooter.

10 Pub Activision
Dev Infinity Ward



Action

Grand Theft Auto IV

It's everything you love about GTA – the twisted characters, epic missions and savage humour – polished to perfection. A true modern masterpiece.

10 Pub Rockstar Games
Dev Rockstar North



Stealth

Metal Gear Solid 4 Guns Of The Patriots

A typically esoteric but masterful end to Snake's saga, blending beautifully immersive action with a lifetime's worth of cut-scenes. Divisive but essential.

10 Pub Konami
Dev Konami Productions

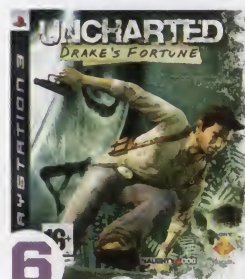


Platformer

Bioshock

Epic first-person adventure set in a ruined underwater city that combines brilliant genetic weapons with beautiful design, tons of atmosphere, and a genuinely affecting story.

10 Pub 2K Games
Dev 2K Marin



Action-Adventure Uncharted Drake's Fortune

Treasure hunter Nathan Drake is after the fabled gold of El Dorado in this superb blend of action and physical puzzling. Think Gears Of War meets Tomb Raider.

9 Pub Sony
Dev Naughty Dog



Shooter

Resistance 2

A sequel that masterfully surpasses the original. Nathan Hale returns to fight bigger aliens on American soil and delivers on gameplay, guns and polish.

9 Pub Sony
Dev Insomniac



Platformer

Ratchet & Clank Tools Of Destruction

Platforming royalty return to save the galaxy. Exquisite graphics and a riotous arsenal of comedy weapons make this the pair's best interstellar outing yet.

9 Pub Sony
Dev Insomniac



Music

SingStar

Sony's much-loved karaoke game steps up to next-gen with a neater interface, online options and tons of tunes via SingStore. Outkast's Hey Ya and Killers' Mr Brightside are highlights.

9 Pub Sony
Dev SCE Studios London



Action-RPG

Fallout 3

The natural successor to Oblivion's RPG throne plays out in a post-apocalyptic America with Liam Neeson as your AWOL dad. An epic adventure without the self-indulgent sprawl.

9 Pub Bethesda Softworks
Dev Bethesda Game Studios

PS3
Mutants



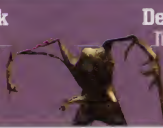
Dark Sector

As mutations go, Hayden Tenno's razor sharp frisbee arm has to be one of the most practical. Except at airport security.



The Incredible Hulk

From nerdy scientist loser to angry green madman, all thanks to the power of delicious gamma radiation.



Dead Space

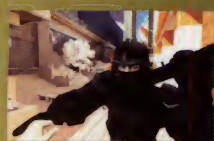
There's only one cure for this necromorph alien infestation: dismemberment.



Bioshock

Turns out an underwater world and sea slug stem cells are the perfect recipe for hook-handed horror chicks. Who knew?

Team Choice



Mirror's Edge

"Want something different from your first-person action? This is an essential experience. Zipping over minimalist city rooftops and wall-running across vibrant billboards as super-hot Faith is unlike anything else I've played."

Leon Hurley
Commissioning editor

Power

Custom silicon harnesses crisp HD, ear-splitting audio, multi-processor might, and Blu-ray to deliver pure gaming perfection.

Connectivity

USB slots to plug in your motion-sensing Sixaxis pads and many other devices.

Online

Surf the net, message friends and download movies, music and expansion packs, plus demos and games from the PlayStation Store.



11 Action Mirror's Edge

A real Marmite game. We loved it for the thrill of leaping across the glistening rooftops of a suspiciously perfect future city while pursued by trigger-happy cops. Idiots, meanwhile, didn't.

9 Pub EA
Dev DICE



12 Sports FIFA 09

Impressively strong core gameplay on the pitch, ten-on-ten online matches and a new multiseason Be A Pro mode make this the top-scoring football choice on PS3.

9 Pub EA
Dev EA Canada



13 Sports PES 09

Can't match FIFA for licences, but the new Champions League and Become A Legend modes add depth and confirm PES's status as the traditionalist's footy game of choice.

9 Pub Konami
Dev Konami



14 Shooter Far Cry 2

Dry, dusty, African sandbox run-and-gun action with an ace level editor. Not only do you have to avoid the bullets in your hunt for arms dealer The Jackal, there's malaria to deal with, too.

9 Pub Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Montreal



15 Racer Race Driver Grid

Straight from the TOCA garage and into first place. Smooth mechanics, aggressive races and fine-tuned cars that make this the best racer yet on PS3.

9 Pub Codemasters
Dev Codemasters



16 Racer Midnight Club Los Angeles

Rockstar's street racer comes of age, rediscovering tuner culture's West Coast roots with a superb recreation of the City Of Angels and punchy car handling.

9 Pub Rockstar Games
Dev Rockstar San Diego



17 Music Guitar Hero World Tour

Bigger, better, rockier. Battles are out, the set list is super strong, drums and vocals mean you don't need to wait for Rock Band 2, plus there's a studio too!

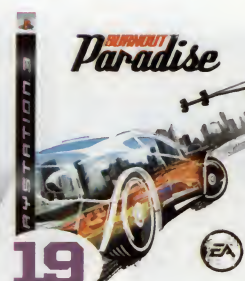
9 Pub Activision
Dev Neversoft



18 Fighter Soulcalibur IV

Darth Vader aside, this is essential stuff. The swordplay is as accessible and strong as ever, with deep character customisation and online play completing the package.

9 Pub Ubisoft
Dev Namco



19 Racer Burnout Paradise

The ultra-fast crash-obsessed racer goes open-world with no menus and no lobbies – just a massive city packed with races, events and hidden routes. DLC content is making it even better.

9 Pub EA
Dev Criterion Games



20 Action Dead Space

Interstellar survival horror that robs from Bioshock, Resident Evil 4 and Event Horizon, but gets away with it thanks to looking beautiful, playing brilliantly and delivering some very big scares.

8 Pub EA
Dev EA Redwood Shores



Resistance 2

There's a nasty, alien mutagenic bug going around, and even hero Nathan Hale has the sniffles. Best shoot anyone who sneezes.



Marvel Ultimate Alliance

No Marvel mash-up would be complete without everyone's favourite spiky-handed hero, X-Men's Wolverine.



Blacksite Area 51

Meet the Reborn, a mutant army created by an unholy alliance of alien technology and naughty government meddling. Oh NSA...



Prince of Persia

A nasty plague has turned innocent bystanders into hideous beasts! Thank goodness for wall-running royals.



Fallout 3

The radioactive RPG is a fiesta of freaks, with two-headed cows, giant green super-mutants and zombie-like ghouls.

Hi-Def Directory

Ensure your PS3 games and Blu-ray movies look their best with a lovely new HDTV. Go on, you deserve it...

Plasma Best buys



£524*
Panasonic TH-37PX80B

Unusual to describe anything north of 500 sheets as incredible value – but this is, and if you're serious about HD it's a perfect way to get involved. Not 1080p, but at this size you won't notice, and for our money the picture quality shames its LCD rivals.

Size 37" Native resolution 1,024 x 720 1080p No
Connections 3xHDMI, 1xComponent, 1xComposite, 1xS-Video, 2xSCART, 1xPC Input, Freeview



£696
Panasonic TH-42PZ80B

Just a couple of years back you'd have been paying three large for a plasma this big, and without the ace picture Panasonic is now serving up. Best of all, it features built-in Freesat so you can watch HD content from the BBC and ITV.

Size 42" Native resolution 1,920 x 1,080 1080p Yes
Connections 3xHDMI, 1xComponent, 1xComposite, 1xS-Video, 2xSCART, 1xPC Input, Freesat



£1,850
Pioneer PDP-LX5090

We love Pio plasmas like Jesus loves sinners, and the Japanese firm's ninth-gen panel shames other HDTVs with its obsidian black levels, rich colours and sumptuous motion handling. Seriously, that Post Office *wants* to be robbed.

Size 50" Native resolution 1,920 x 1,080 1080p Yes
Connections 3xHDMI, 1xComponent, 1xS-Video, 3xSCART, 1xPC Input, 1xUSB input

LCD Best buys



£342
Samsung LE-26A456

Perhaps overcompensating for its relative teeniness, this little Sammy punches way above its price point. Picture quality is competitive with models costing twice as much, and a trio of HDMI sockets means you're connected like Russian mob.

Size 26" Native resolution 1,366 x 768 1080p No
Connections 3xHDMI, 1xS-video, 1xComponent, 2xSCART, 1xPC Input, Integrated Freeview



£585
Sony KDL-32W4000

There are cheaper sets available for less money and at bigger sizes, but this entry level Bravia won't be beaten on picture quality, and gives you the satisfaction of having all your kit Sony-badged. Even the menus are based on PS3's XMB.

Size 32" Native resolution 1,920 x 1,080 1080p Yes
Connections 3xHDMI, 1xComponent, 1xComposite, 2xSCART, 1xS-video, 1xPC Input, 1xUSB input, Freeview



£1,246
Sony KDL-52W4000

Desperate to give Uncle Sony some more shiny dollars? This superb Bravia will enrage your other half with its imperial-sized proportions, but at least you can claim the frame is elegant. Like the 2001 monolith. In your front room.

Size 52" Native resolution 1,920 x 1,080 1080p Yes
Connections 3xHDMI, 1xComponent, 1xComposite, 2xSCART, 1xPC Input, 1xUSB input, Freeview

Essential Blu-ray movies



Wall-E

Pixar proves it's still streets ahead with its latest CG epic – a gorgeous love story about the last rubbish-collecting robot on Earth.



The Dark Knight

Huge sequel – the twisting 'order-versus-chaos' story is nothing short of operatic, the action still bone-break stern.



Hellboy 2

Bursting with colour and creatures dredged from the unspeakable imagination of director Guillermo del Toro.

FAQ

Do I need an HDTV to play PS3?

Simple answer: no. You can connect your PS3 to almost any standard definition TV using the composite lead supplied with the console. Do yourself a favour, though, and upgrade to a superior RGB SCART lead. However, to see PS3 games in all their glory, we massively recommend getting an HDTV. Don't even consider buying a flatscreen without the 'HD ready' badge, because it ensures you'll get the right sockets to hook up in hi-def.

How does PS3 look on a normal TV?

Even in standard definition, the jump from PS2 to PS3 impresses. You were happy with how your PS2 looked through SCART on a normal TV, right? Assuming you're using the same set-up, PS3 games are going to look that much better because the machine is so much more powerful. More problematic is playing old games on an HDTV, because they have a lower resolution and the image therefore has to be upscaled and processed. The end result can be a smeared, blurry picture.

720p/1080i/1080p... WTF does it all mean?

These are the different flavours of hi-def signal. The numbers refer to the amount of horizontal lines in the picture; the more lines there are, the higher the detail. As for the letters, 'p' means a progressively scanned image, which is more stable and smooth because each frame is drawn in its entirety, whereas 'i' is an interlaced signal that rapidly switches between the odd and even horizontal lines of an image, giving the impression of a full frame. Roughly speaking, 720p is best for fast motion but 1080i suits more static, detailed visuals with 1080p therefore being the best of both worlds and ultimate daddy.

Do I need a 1080p compatible set?

It's certainly not essential. At present, only top-end HDTVs are capable of displaying 1080p, and games that support the signal, such as Ridge Racer 7 and Virtua Tennis 3, are in the minority – but as time goes by that will change. However, there's an argument to say that for anything less than super-sized screens (say, below 46") the difference between 720p and 1080p is actually pretty negligible – and certainly nowhere near the quantum shift you get going from standard to hi-def.

Should I buy an LCD or plasma?

The variation in quality between models and manufacturers means there's no easy answer. LCD screens tend to have higher resolutions (good news if you're after 1080p), are lightweight and cost less at



larger screen sizes. However, the blacks can look slightly washed out and some LCD panels struggle with fast motion. Plasma, contrastingly, deals with motion confidently and delivers rich black and vibrant colours – but the sets are chunkier and guzzle power. There's also a slight risk of screen burn, when on-screen information (such as an energy bar) remains as an afterimage, although the problem isn't usually permanent. Forced to choose? We'd probably plump for a 42" Pioneer or Panasonic plasma. But if you're paying we'll have a 46" Bravia X-series LCD.

How big should my TV be?

Big is always best. You also need to consider the size of your room and budget, though. The size of flat-panel screens mean you'll want to sit further back than you did with your old TV. As a rough measurement, multiply the diagonal size of the screen by three and it will give you an idea of how far away to plonk the La-Z-Boy. So for a 42" screen you should sit it about 10ft back.

How do I make my PS3 run hi-def?

Connect any HDMI cable between your PS3 and your HDTV and the console will automatically recognise it and ask if you want to display hi-def. Say yes, obviously. It should also check the maximum resolution your panel supports, but this can also be tweaked in the display settings menu on the XMB. If you're connecting via Component you'll also need to go into the same menu and select that option under Display Settings, after which you'll be asked to choose which HD resolution to use.

Help, the screen has gone blank!

Assuming everything's on and all the leads are connected, you've probably selected the wrong resolution. Switch the unit to standby and then turn it on by holding the power button for five seconds until you hear a bleep. If an HDMI lead's plugged in the PS3 will detect it. Otherwise it'll revert to the standard AV output using a composite lead.

Getting connected

You've got the hardware, now hook it all up

HDMI

Transmits hi-def video and audio as a pure digital signal – the best possible connection. These don't come with PS3 and will set you back around £20.

Component

These cables deliver an analogue signal capable of carrying hi-def video. Three separate wires are used for the red, green and blue picture information.

RGB/SCART

This is used for the standard audiovisual connection. It's analogue-only, but provides a crisp and clear picture that will serve you well. It won't deliver that hi-def crispness though.

S-Video

This splits the analogue video signal into chrominance (colour) and luminance (light), resulting in a better picture compared with a standard composite lead.

Composite

Bog-standard analogue signal. Picture quality is fuzzy and prone to colour bleed. It's also the lead you get in the PS3 box. Cheers! Do yourself a favour: upgrade immediately.

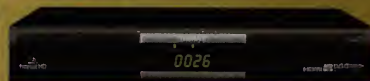
Optical

This is a laser-powered, audio-only connection used to send digital sound to your TV or home cinema amp for deep bass and crystal-clear effects.



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HD choice



Humax HD Freesat box

Over 130 channels with no subscription, and because it's a satellite signal there's enough bandwidth for hi-def content. Unfortunately, at present that only means BBC HD and ITV's near non-existent contribution.

Price £140.25 Channels 130+ Stockist amazon.co.uk
Resolution 1080i, 720p, 576p, 576i Website humaxdigital.com



No Country For Old Men

Drug money, determinism vs freewill and ultra-preposterous hair in the Coens' neo-Western.



The Matrix Trilogy

The first one's still amazing, but even the borked sequels are worth a revisit in shiny hi-def.



The Godfather Trilogy

The third one (boo!) still hasn't improved, but parts I and II are proper '70s masterpieces.



There Will Be Blood

A huge performance from Daniel Day Lewis anchors this dark, unsettling oil epic. Large on ideas, small on sentiment, and beautiful to look at.

who is...

Niko Bellic

GTA IV's loveable one-man war

Other Grand Theft Auto anti-heroes have been young, impetuous and psychopathic, but Nicky B is a different breed. Born in war-torn Eastern Europe, he's come to Liberty City looking for the American dream, and he's got a face full of hollow points for anyone who gets in his way. But he's got a nice side, too – he makes friends easily, the ladies love him, and he's incredibly loyal to his waster cousin Roman. Add to that his talents – from kidnapping to flying helicopters – and you're looking at a modern-day renaissance man.

#24
PLAYSTATION
LEGENDS
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Official Magazine - UK

Sharp shooters

Sniper rifle

All the fun of a headshot, none of the shredded brain on your expensive leather jacket. It's an essential piece of kit for Playboy X's Deconstruction For Beginners mission.



RPG-7V

Your classic Soviet tank buster – the model used in GTA dates back to the '50s, and while it's pricey at \$5,000 a shot, the stopping power and pleasing spiral smoke trail are hard to fault.



Combat shotgun

Boasting ten shots of 12-gauge buck through reloads, the shotgun chews through ammo but stops almost anything. For tricky house clearances and any sort of spiral staircase, it's essential.



AK-47

When you absolutely have to kill everybody in the room... or in a warehouse, on a rooftop and during the ensuing escape – the AK-47's hefty rate of fire and plentiful ammo makes it the best pick.



Friends like these

Bruce

If you can get over the mood swings, bullshark testosterone rage, constant boasting and 'weird balls', a helicopter ride with Bruce and two beautiful babes is a nice way to see the City's sights. Alpha! ALPHA!



Dwayne

There's a moment when Dwayne phones to say he missed a call and thought it might be you that highlights the tragedy of this ex-con. He gets a bit needy after that, but his dial-a-mob service more than makes up for it.



Packie

A hard-drinking, drug-addicted Irish psycho, Packie McReary loves a good strip bar, is brilliant at darts... and will blow up any cars you like. Absolutely no stereotyping going on there, then.



Bernie

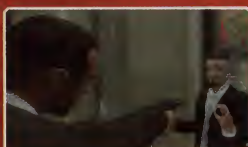
Technically not a friend in the sense that you can ring him for a cheeky pint, but messed up Florian 'Bernie' Cravic served with Niko in the Kosovo war and proves to be one of the game's most loveable characters.



Best missions

Final interview

Niko has to assassinate lawyer Thomas Goldberg by applying for a job at his company, then taking him out during the interview. It's like Rockstar had a thing against shyster lawyers...



Three-leaf clover

Niko's biggest cash job comes during a botched bank raid that's an homage to Heat. Constant action and one of Niko's best lines: "You don't want to die for the bank's money!"



Hostile negotiation

When Roman gets kidnapped, Niko goes crazy. The shootout that follows isn't pretty as you realise exactly what he's capable of.



That special someone

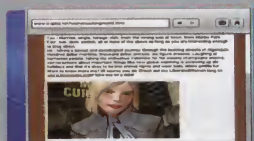
Niko finds the man he's come to the city to kill, but Darko Brevic is a crack-addled shell of a man. It's up to you to choose his fate.



Niko trivia



Niko had a brother back in the old country, but never reveals what happened to him. He will say, though, that his dad was a massive bully...



Niko's not shy. Read the in-game site blogsnobs.org after dating Alex Chilton to find out what happens when he goes in for coffee...

Any man worth his salt loves his mother. Check out the badly-worded email from the old lady at a cyber cafe, then hit the smiley-face response button to tap out Niko's beautifully heartfelt reply.



For a sartorial nod to the past, whack Playboy X then look in his wardrobe to get the classic outfit from GTA III. Luckily the controls don't get worse.



Opt to have three lap dances in a row (I know, force yourself!) and after five minutes Niko brings in two dancers at once for some digital sexy time.

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